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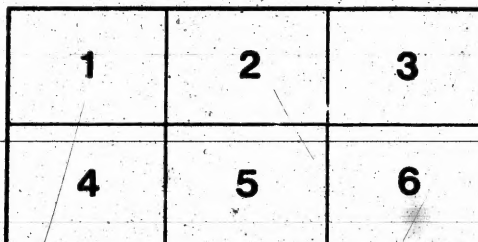
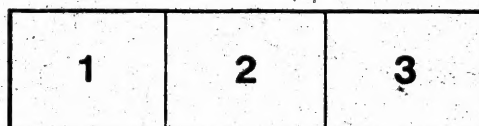
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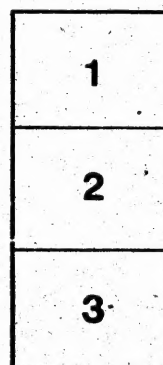
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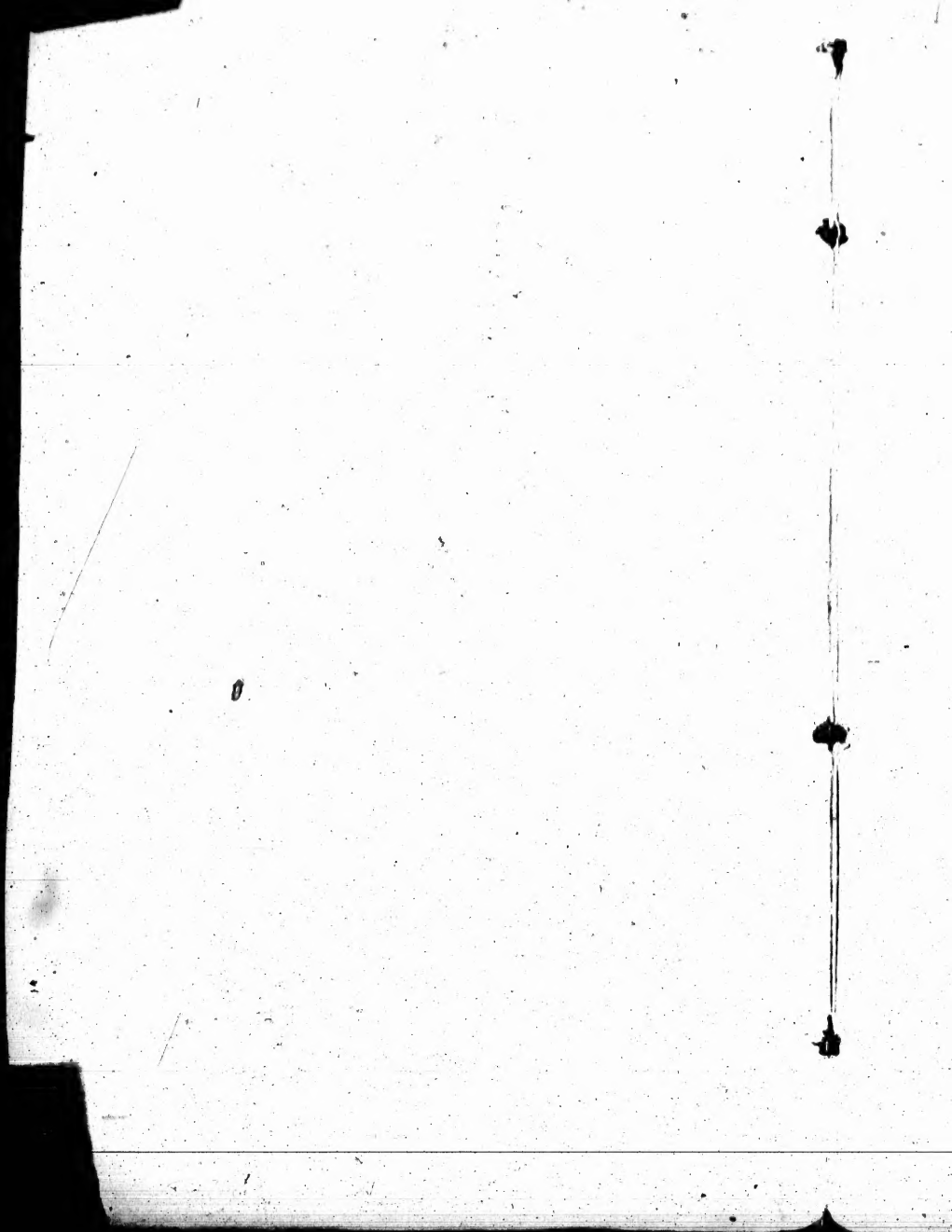
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ADVERTISEMENT.

This Volume of Tracts is not offered as a perfect Outline of Congregationalism. Each Tract contains an argument complete in itself, and peculiar to the subject discussed. It is hoped that they will tend to elucidate correct views of the Truth, as exhibited in the New Testament; and thus prove a blessing to the Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Further information on the subjects discussed, will be found in the Pamphlets by Orme and Robertson, on the Constitution, Ordinances, and Administration of the Kingdom of Christ; and in the able Essay by the late Dr. Wardlaw, entitled "Congregational Independency in contradistinction to Episcopacy and Presbyterianism: the Church Polity of the New Testament."

The Reader is particularly requested to read all the passages quoted in the Holy Scriptures.

WHAT IS A CHURCH OF CHRIST?

THE importance of this question will not be disputed by any who reverence the authority of the word of God, and who regard the Scriptures as the only standard of religious truth and Christian practice. If the Lord Jesus Christ, as the King and Head of the church, has been graciously pleased to promulgate laws for the regulation of his people in their associated capacity, and to make provision for the proper ordering of the affairs of his house, it surely becomes his followers carefully to investigate these laws, and to endeavour to ascertain what that order is, which he has established. This is a matter in regard to which no one can be indifferent, who is ambitious of walking so as to please Christ; inasmuch as obedience to his injunctions, as the supreme Law-giver in the church, must be connected with the proper carrying out of his designs of mercy in reference to mankind, and with the advancement of his glory in the earth. The sincere follower of the redeemer, therefore, will betake himself to the careful study of the New Testament, the statute-book of his kingdom, in order to discover what a church really is, and what those arrangements are, which the Lord Jesus has instituted for the regulation of his house.

It is to be observed, however, that the investigation of this subject is prosecuted, in most cases, under many disadvantages. It frequently happens, that the inquirer has much to unlearn ere he can arrive at the truth. Before he can proceed with safety, he requires to settle the scriptural meaning of the very terms which he is ne-

cessitated to employ; and to do this properly, he must lay aside not a few of his early prejudices, and must for the time, keep out of view opinions and practices, of the correctness and propriety of which he has never been led to entertain a doubt. In examining the New Testament, for example, with the view of ascertaining the scriptural import of the word *church*, he will find that that important term has, during the lapse of time, materially changed its signification, and that ideas have been attached to it in modern days widely different from those which it was employed to express in the apostolic age. He will search in vain for any passage in the inspired record, in which the word is used to denote the *building* in which Christians assembled for the worship of God; as if a church were an edifice composed of stones and timber. A church of Christ is always distinguished by the New Testament writers from the *house* in which believers met for the celebration of divine ordinances.—Rom. xvi. 5; 1 Cor. xvi. 19; Col. iv. 15. And the inquirer will find himself equally unsuccessful in his search for a passage in which the word is employed to denote *ecclesiastical rulers*; as if a church, and the office-bearers of a church, were phrases of synonymous import. The term is never used by the sacred writers to denote persons in office, viewed apart from the people. Nor is there a solitary text to be met with in the New Testament in which the term is employed to designate the *body of believers in a given district or province, or country*, comprising a variety of congregations. We never read of the *church* of Judea, the *church* of Galatia, the *church* of Macedonia, &c. The sacred penmen, when referring to the societies of believers in a given locality, uniformly employ the plural, and write, the *churches* of Judea, the *churches* of Galatia, the *churches* of Macedonia, &c.—1 Thess. ii. 14; Gal. i. 2-22; 2 Cor. viii. 1.

The use of the term in question in these different acceptations may, at first sight appear to be of little importance; but when we consider the powerful influ-

ence which the ideas attached to words exerts over our views of divine truth, we cannot be sufficiently on our guard against departing from the scriptural import of the expressions we employ. It is a well-known fact, that the attaching of such ideas to the word under consideration, as those which have been specified, has had the effect of conveying a very erroneous impression of what a church of Christ really is, and of occasioning no little confusion of thought in reference to a subject which is depicted with such admirable clearness and simplicity in the pages of the New Testament.

In that portion of the sacred volume, the term occurs only in a two-fold acceptance. It denotes, either one society of believers meeting together in one place for the observance of divine ordinances, 1 Cor. i. 2, compared with chap. v. 4; 1 Thess. i. 1; 2 Thess. i. 1; or it denotes the whole body of believers in heaven and on earth—Eph. i. 22; v. 25-30; Heb. xii. 23. In the one or the other of these two senses, it will be found that the word church is uniformly employed by the sacred writers. If the candid inquirer has any doubt as to the correctness of this statement, he may easily satisfy himself by an examination of all the passages in the New Testament in which the term occurs.

By a church of Christ, then, we are to understand a society of believers assembling in one place in obedience to his authority, for the observance of the appointed ordinances. Now, in endeavoring to answer the important question, What is a church of Christ? we have only to inquire what were the leading characteristics of those churches that were planted by the apostles, and of the constitution and order of which, an account is given in the inspired record. These primitive societies were established by the authority of Jesus Christ, as the exalted King and Head of his people; and all their affairs were regulated by his accredited ambassadors. They were designed as model churches for all coming generations; and all Christian societies that are ambitious of being

WHAT IS A CHURCH OF CHRIST ?

regarded as "followers of the churches which in Judea were in Christ Jesus," must copy this apostolic pattern. The reader is earnestly solicited to attend to the following, as a few of the principal characteristics of the churches in the primitive times :—

I. The churches constituted by the apostles were composed exclusively of persons who made a *credible profession of conversion to God*.

This was the only term of communion in the apostolic age. When an individual discovered a competent acquaintance with the simple elements of the gospel, and professed to feel the power of the truth on his soul, if there was nothing in his deportment inconsistent with such a profession, he was at once admitted to Christian fellowship. The order observed in all cases of admission, was, first to believe on Christ with the heart, and then to confess him with the mouth—to give themselves first to the Lord, and then to his people by the will of God. It was regarded as a self-evident truth, that Christ's ordinances were for Christ's people ; and the door was carefully shut against all who did not furnish evidence of having undergone a saving change. Such a thing as a promiscuous admission of converted and unconverted persons to the fellowship of churches, was utterly unknown in apostolic times.

From the account which the evangelist Luke has given in the Acts of the Apostles, of the formation of the early churches, we learn, that those only who professed to have embraced the Gospel, and to have experienced the regenerating power of divine grace, were recognized as disciples, and received into communion. The church at Jerusalem, the first constituted of the primitive societies, was composed of persons who had "gladly received the word" which was spoken by Peter, and who had cordially believed the divine testimony ; Acts ii. 37-47. In a subsequent part of the narrative, the churches in Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, are represented as "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy-Ghost,"

—language which clearly teaches, that they were composed of persons regenerated by the grace of God, and enjoying the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit; Acts ix. 31. When churches were formed at Cesarea, at Ephesus, at Philippi, at Thessalonica, at Berea, at Corinth, &c., it is obvious, that those only were associated together in the fellowship of the gospel who afforded credible evidence of conversion to God; Acts x. 44-48, &c.

This is evident also, from the terms which the apostles employed in addressing the churches. Paul, in writing to the church of God which was at Corinth, addressed that body as persons who were "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints," 1 Cor. i. 2. The church at Ephesus he termed "saints and faithful in Christ Jesus." Eph. i. 1. To the church at Colosse he wrote in similar language, calling them "Saints and faithful brethren in Christ Jesus," Col. i. 2. The church of the Thessalonians he represents as being "in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Thess. i. 1. These various forms of expression clearly convey the idea that the apostle regarded the persons to whom the epistles were addressed as savingly converted to God. If the phraseology which he employs does not denote this, it is difficult to conceive what words he could have selected that would have conveyed the idea more distinctly.

It is obvious that purity of fellowship constituted a distinguished feature in the character of the primitive societies. All who cordially embraced the truth, and afforded evidence of having become "new creatures in Christ Jesus," were welcomed to the enjoyment of Christian ordinances. All others were carefully debarred from the society of the faithful. There was then a thorough separation between the church and the world. There doubtless crept in occasionally among the churches individuals whose principles were not sound, and whose hearts were not right with God, such as Simon Magus, and the incestuous person in Corinth; but as soon as their real

character was discovered, they were separated from the company of the disciples ;* 1 Cor. v. 13.

It is manifest, therefore, that a church of Christ is a society composed exclusively of believers—of individuals who, by a walk and conversation in harmony with the profession which they make, afford credible evidence of having passed from death unto life. And a very little consideration will serve to convince us, that such churches only are fitted to answer the ends for which Christian societies are constituted. What are those ends? They are constituted for the two-fold object of promoting their own edification and progress in the divine life, and for advancing the cause of the Redeemer in the world around by their efforts and prayers. Hence they are commanded to “work out their own salvation with fear and trembling,” to “walk in love,” to “let the word of Christ dwell in them richly in all wisdom,” that they may “grow up to him in all things, who is the head, even Christ;” and they are solemnly enjoined to “let their light so shine before men, that they seeing their good works, may glorify their Father who is in Heaven;”—to “shine as lights in the world, holding forth the world of life,”—directions which can be attended to only by those who have experienced the power of the gospel on their souls.

II. In apostolic times, *the office-bearers of the churches were chosen by the whole body of the members.*

This was one of the peculiar privileges which the early Christians enjoyed. It was a privilege granted by the King of Zion; and no one, in the primitive age, ever attempted to take it from them. Even the apostles themselves, great as were the powers with which they were

* See this subject treated at greater length in tract “The Table of the Lord,” &c. Answers are there given to several objections that are usually urged against the views that are advocated in these pages in regard to purity of Christian fellowship—objections drawn from a mistaken interpretation of the parable of the tares—from the alleged fact, that the traitor Judas was present at the institution of the Lord’s Supper—from there having been hypocrites in the primitive churches, &c.

invested, never thought of coming between the people and the objects of their choice. The selection of their "bishops and deacons" was their inalienable right.

Their manner of proceeding in the election of office-bearers is recorded by Luke, in the 6th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. When it was deemed necessary that the church at Jerusalem should select brethren for the management of their temporal affairs, that the apostles might be left at liberty to devote themselves entirely to prayer and to the ministry of the word, we are told that "they called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore brethren, look ye out from among you seven men, of honest report, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, whom we may appoint over this business." This proposal was cordially approved of by the whole body of the people, and they chose seven brethren to the office of the deaconship, whom the apostles afterwards set apart to the work by prayer and the imposition of hands. It will be observed, that the apostles did not choose the deacons on that occasion—that they did not even nominate them—the matter was left in the hands of the church; and the brethren were elected by the spontaneous suffrages of the disciples. And no member of the church was excluded from the enjoyment of this privilege. All had a voice in the matter—young and old—male and female. The apostles "called the multitude of the disciples unto them," and left the business entirely in their hands. In this manner were pastors and deacons elected by the primitive saints. No man, no body of men, ever ventured to rob them of this sacred right. Such a thing as patronage, lay or clerical, was, in those days of primitive simplicity utterly unknown. The apostles deemed the people fully competent to choose their office-bearers; and they carefully abstained from interfering in the matter, farther than pointing out for their guidance the qualifications that were requisite for the

proper discharge of the duties connected with the respective offices.

As the Redeemer has committed such power into his people's hands, it is obvious, that to attempt to deprive them of this privilege, is to trample under foot the laws of the King of Zion, and to introduce customs into his churches that are at utter variance with his revealed institutions, and subversive of the liberty of his saints. Let it be observed, therefore, that the church of Christ is not only a society of persons who give credible evidence of conversion to God, but a society which possesses and enjoys, without control or interference from any quarter, the privilege of electing brethren to bear office among them.

III. In the apostolic age, *the churches admitted their own members.*

It is evident from the New Testament, that the primitive societies elected, not only their pastors and deacons, but all who were received into their fellowship. Applicants were admitted, not by their pastors alone, nor by a limited number of their body delegated to undertake that department of spiritual duty, but by the church as a whole. By a careful investigation of the inspired record, it will be found, that a much larger body of evidence can be collected to establish the right of churches to admit their members, than to prove, that their exalted Head has committed to them the choice of their pastors. Should the reader be startled at this remark, he is requested to examine the New Testament, and he will not fail to be satisfied as to its correctness.

Were the New Testament altogether silent on the subject, and were we simply informed, that the churches of Christ, as societies of his followers, were to walk together in love and holy fellowship, and that there had been granted to them the right of choosing brethren to the pastorate and deaconship; on these grounds alone, it might reasonably be inferred, that the Lord Jesus intended

his churches to possess the privilege of admitting persons to their fellowship. In the first place, it will be readily admitted, that there can be no fellowship worthy of the name in churches that is not based on christian confidence. Now it is evident, that there can be no confidence but such as springs from the knowledge of character. In order that such knowledge and confidence may be possessed, it is necessary that the members of a church should be acquainted with the principles which those who apply for admission into their communion hold, and of the profession which they make, and should be satisfied as to the scripturalness of their principles, and the genuineness of that profession. Without such satisfaction there can be no confidence and no fellowship. It follows, therefore, that in order to the enjoyment of fellowship in christian churches, all connected with them must have a voice in the admission of their members. This is equally obvious from the fact, that the churches of Christ possess the privilege of electing their pastors and deacons. It will be allowed, that to judge of the qualifications of office-bearers, is attended with greater difficulty, and requires a superior amount of discrimination than to judge of the profession of candidates for fellowship. It is easy to see then, that if members of churches are competent for the greater duty, they cannot be viewed as incompetent for discharging the less.

We have been proceeding on the assumption, that nothing is revealed in the New Testament on the subject; but this is far from being the case. That persons were admitted into the early churches by the whole body of the people, is evident from what is stated in the Acts of the Apostles respecting the admission of Paul to the fellowship of the church in Jerusalem. We are told that on intimating his desire to unite with them, they demurred, and refused to receive him, till Barnabas produced proof of the genuineness of his conversion; Acts ix. 26. The manner in which the incestuous person was received back to the communion of the church at Corinth, after having

afforded satisfactory evidence of the sincerity of his repentance, may by referred to as a further proof of this. He had been excluded by the church when assembled together for that purpose ; and the apostle gave directions for his restoration in the same manner. This reception was the deed, not of the brethren in office, but of the whole body of the membership.

Nothing is explicitly stated in the New Testament as to the exact *mode* in which admissions to churches took place. It is evident, that while the whole church had a voice in the admission of those who were received into communion, all the members could not personally examine each individual applicant. Nor was this necessary ; all that was requisite was, that satisfactory evidence should be afforded that those applying for fellowship had undergone a saving change ; and that might in all cases be obtained by the testimony of two or three witnesses. In whatever way such evidence was obtained, one thing is certain, that the members of the church had as much to do in the admission of persons to their fellowship as in the choice of their pastors and deacons.

IV. Another duty to which the churches in primitive times carefully attended, was *the exercise of discipline on offending brethren.*

This matter was not left in the hands of their office-bearers ; all cases of discipline were conducted by the people themselves. In the law which our Lord promulgated respecting the treatment of offences, specific directions are given on this subject. If the offending brother refuse to listen to the admonitions that are administered to him in private, the party offended is directed to take with him one or two more, with the view of endeavouring to bring the offender to a proper sense of his conduct ; and if he still refuse to acknowledge his fault, the matter is, through the medium of the pastor, to be laid before the church, that is, the society with which the parties are connected. They are to deal with him as one who has

violated the laws of Christ. If he manifest signs of repentance, he is to be restored to confidence and retained in fellowship; but if he refuse to hear the church—if he refuse to submit—he is to be regarded “as a heathen man and a publican,” that is, excommunicated. From all this it is very obvious, that the Lord Jesus enjoins discipline in the churches to be exercised by the body of the people; Matt. xviii. 15—17.

The case of the wicked person in the church of Corinth, already referred to, renders it very evident, that the Head of the church intended his people to exercise discipline on those connected with them who violated his laws. Paul, acting under his authority, solemnly enjoined the church at Corinth to put away from them the ungodly man: “In the name of the Lord Jesus, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus, to deliver such an one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.....Put away from among yourselves that wicked person;” 1 Cor. v. 4, 5, 13. This was addressed, it will be observed, not to the pastors or office-bearers of the church merely, but to the church as a whole. When met together in the name of Christ, *they* were to put away the wicked man. Hence we are told in the second Epistle, that the punishment—the sentence of excommunication—was “inflicted by *the many*,” that is, by the body of the people; 2 Cor. ii. 6. These passages clearly teach, that when discipline is to be exercised in a church of Christ, it is to be exercised, not by the office-bearers, acting as the representatives of the rest, but by the church at large. For the purpose, as it were, of preventing a few from engrossing the business to themselves, they are commanded to do it themselves, and in their public assembly.

This is not the place for entering on a discussion respecting the proper mode of conducting the discipline of a church—a subject, it must be admitted, of vast importance;—we have to do at present simply with the fact, that discipline is to be exercised on offending brethren,

not by the rulers or representatives of a church, but by the people themselves. While it is their duty to receive members into their fellowship, it is equally their duty to separate from their communion those who act inconsistently with the profession they have made, and who refuse to yield obedience to the laws of Christ. This is a matter, be it recollected, in which every member of a church is concerned. It is the bounden duty of all to seek the purity of Christ's house. It ought never to be forgotten, that it is impossible for a church to maintain their christian character, or their relation to Christ, if they, collectively or individually, permit with impunity the open, undisguised violation of the divine law. The solemn command is, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers : for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" 2 Cor. vi. 14.

V. The only other feature in the character of the apostolic churches to which we shall at present refer is this : —It is obvious from the New Testament that *those churches supported their pastors by voluntary contributions, and that they neither desired the alliance, nor submitted in religious matters to the control, of political governments.*

The law of Christ on the subject of pastoral support is explicitly laid down in the inspired record. On sending forth his disciples to preach the gospel, he told them that their temporal necessities were to be supplied by those who should enjoy the benefit of their labours. "The labourer," said he, "is worthy of his hire;" Luke x. 7. "The Lord hath ordained," said Paul to the believing Corinthians, "that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel;" 1 Cor. ix. 14. And in language still more explicit, he states the law of the King of Zion, in reference to this subject, when writing to the Galatians: "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things;" Gal. vi. 6. There are few parts of that code of laws which the Lord Jesus has pro-

mulgated for regulating the affairs of his kingdom, so clear as that which has respect to the support of his servants. He has made full provision for the supply of their temporal wants, by teaching them to depend on the liberality of those to whom they minister. His injunctions on this subject are binding on all his followers; and nothing can set them aside but his own authority. So long as these statutes remain unrepealed, it is the duty of those who minister in holy things to depend on the churches for their support; and it is the duty of the churches to minister to their necessities.

That the churches in apostolic times yielded obedience to this equitable law, few will venture to dispute. Their Lord had taught them in explicit terms, that his "kingdom was not of this world"—that it was spiritual in its nature, its subjects, its laws, its institutions—that his people were not to seek the alliance of political governments—and that his servants were to be maintained by those who enjoyed the benefit of their ministrations. It never occurred to the primitive saints that they were to look beyond themselves for the support of the Christian cause. The idea of an alliance with the kingdoms of this world, with the view of giving an increased stability to Christianity, and of more effectually promoting the evangelization of the earth, we venture to say, never entered into the mind of apostle, or preacher, or saint, in the primitive age. It is a well-known fact, that for the first three hundred years, the churches of Christ existed apart from all political governments, and that they prospered and triumphed wherever the standard of the cross was reared. The people of God, during that period, were reproached, and oppressed, and persecuted—every scheme which the ingenuity of man could devise was put in operation to arrest the progress of the Christian cause—that was opposed by the learning of sages, by the superstition of the multitude, and by all the craft and power of statesmen and rulers—and yet it flourished and prevailed;—a triumphant proof, one would think, of the perfect efficiency of the vo-

luntary principle, and a manifest token, that during that time of mighty minds and hearts, the soldiers of the cross enjoyed the approving smile of their exalted Lord. It was then proved that the cause of the Redeemer requires no extraneous aid for its support—that Christianity fills within itself a strength and a prowess that is able to bear down all opposition—and that, unaided and alone, with nothing to depend on but the almighty arm of its Founder, and the zeal and energy of its friends, it is fitted to promote the present and eternal well-being of the human race. It needs nothing from statesmen or earthly rulers, it asks nothing from them but to let it alone. Strange is it, that with the law of Christ in reference to the support of His servants so clearly and explicitly unfolded in the pages of the New Testament, and the great fact, that christianity flourished and triumphed in the very commencement of its career, not only without the assistance of political governments, but while encountering the most strenuous and determined opposition which it was in their power to put forth—strange is it, that with these laws and this wonderful fact before them, any of the Redeemer's followers should have ever harboured a doubt as to the efficiency of the voluntary principle to maintain his cause in the earth, and should have sought alliance with the kingdoms of this world, with the view of strengthening and promoting that cause. The primitive saints were better taught—their faith was stronger—and it will be vain, we think, to look for the piety, and the purity, and resistless might of primitive christianity, until the followers of Christ shall have better learned, not only to maintain the Headship of the Redeemer in his kingdom, but, in religious matters, to stand aloof entirely from the kingdoms of this world, and to fight the battles of the faith with those spiritual weapons with which He has furnished them.

It will be observed that, in these pages we have endeavoured to show, that the churches constituted by the apostles, and intended to serve as models for christian societies in all coming ages, were composed exclusively of

persons who made a credible profession of conversion to God—that the members of those churches enjoyed the privilege of choosing their pastors and deacons—that applicants for fellowship were admitted to communion, and discipline exercised on offending brethren, not by a number of individuals with delegated authority for that purpose, but by the whole body of the people—and that those churches supported their pastors by voluntary contributions, and neither desired the alliance, nor submitted in religious matters to the control of political governments. The views which have thus been advanced respecting the nature and constitution of the apostolic churches, the reader is requested carefully to examine. They may, perhaps, run counter to the notions which he has hitherto been led to entertain, in reference to the subject; but let him lay aside all his preconceived opinions—let him endeavour to shake off the trammels of human authority and human systems—let him keep out of view what this man, or that body of men, thinks about the matter—and let him come, as an humble inquirer, to the word of God, with the view of ascertaining what the Lord Jesus has made known respecting his kingdom. If the views advocated in these pages, after being carefully compared with the standard of truth, do not appear to be taught in the Scriptures, by all means let them be rejected; but, if it be found, after diligent investigation, that they are in harmony with what God has revealed in his word, none of his people may reject them with impunity. Let the believing reader prayerfully examine the matter, and let him not hesitate to follow out his conscientious convictions.

Let it be remembered, that the subject which has passed under review is not a matter of indifference. Scriptural views of the nature and constitution of Christ's kingdom are inseparably connected with the advancement of his cause in the earth. *It is impossible, on the other hand, to estimate the amount of injury that has accrued to Christianity from the want of purity of fellowship in*

churches—the depriving Christ's people of their inalienable right to conduct the affairs of his house—and from the unhallowed alliance between Christianity and the kingdoms of this world. The Lord Jesus intended his churches to be the medium through which blessings should be conveyed to our lost and perishing race. It is in connexion with their piety, and purity, and zeal, that the earth is to be evangelized. In primitive times they shone as lights in the world, and held forth the word of life to guide men to the haven of eternal rest. And the glorious effects that followed are well known ;—the word of God ran, and had free course, and was glorified ; and untold myriads were brought under the power of the truth. Then the church of Christ was pure ; then his people were free ; then there was no dependence on an arm of flesh. But how different the state of matters now ! Multitudes who name the name of Christ do not depart from iniquity ; promiscuous assemblages of converted and unconverted people are seen crowding to the table of the Lord ; privileges which the Saviour intended all his followers to enjoy, are monopolized by a few ; and there is on the part of many, an eager grasping after the pomp and glitter of a state establishment. And what has been the effect ? The way of truth has been evil spoken of—a false representation has been given of the christian system—weapons have been put into the hands of infidelity—the cause of Christ has been retarded in its progress—the name of God has been dishonoured among men—and souls have been ruined for ever. Evils these truly of no common magnitude ; and yet these evils may all be traced to unscriptural views of the nature and constitution of Christ's kingdom, and to a departure from the purity that distinguished the churches in apostolic times. Surely, surely, it is high time that this subject should receive the degree of attention, which its paramount importance demands. Let human systems of ecclesiastical polity be discarded—let the Bible alone be adopted as the standard of religious truth—let christian societies be formed after the model of those churches that were planted by apostolic men ; then, and not till then, will Zion appear in her strength and beauty, and the cause of God be triumphant in the earth.

ON
THE NATURE
OF

Christian Fellowship.

ONE of the first effects of the belief of the gospel in primitive times was, the separation of believers from the world, and their association together in visible church-fellowship. No sooner do we hear of men believing and turning to the Lord, than we hear that all that believed were together. Nor do we find, in all the New Testament, a single instance of one professing to believe the gospel and not seeking to join the disciples. The association of believers as visible societies, obeying the laws and observing the ordinances of their exalted Lord, not only answered the end of their own edification, but also exhibited a constant testimony against the absurdity—the impurity—the impiety of the popular worship, as a corruption of ordinances originally divine. The Temples, Priests, and Sacrifices of idolatrous worship, were doubtless derived originally from the divine model of patriarchal, or levitical worship. And who does not know, that corruption of christian ordinances, as inconsistent with the inspired model of the new economy, as idolatry was with that of the old, has taken place under the christian profession?

Some of the brethren in the church in Corinth, it appears, wishing to avoid the charge of bigotry, and to

make their court to the priests, and other leaders in the national worship, joined occasionally with their neighbours in their idolatrous festivals! This temporizing conduct they attempted to vindicate by saying, that they knew "That an idol was nothing in the world, and that there was no other God but one," 1 Cor. viii. 4-11. Hence when they sat down to feast with their neighbours in the Idol's Temple, they neither joined with them in religious veneration of the Idol, nor did they eat of the sacrifices otherwise than a common meal. This however was but a lame vindication, when confronted with the uniform abhorrence in which God held every species of idolatry, and the earnestness with which he warned his people not to give it in any shape their countenance. What was the language of their conduct when they joined, though but in appearance, with idolaters in religious worship? Was it not that they had fellowship with them in presenting their devotions to the Idol, and in receiving blessings in return? Was it not that they saw little difference between the true God and a dumb idol, as objects of adoration—between idolatrous festivals and christian institutions—between an idolatrous assembly feasting and revelling, and a christian church observing divine ordinances? In short, did they not say by their conduct that men gained little by becoming christians, and lost as little by continuing idolaters? For the truth of these positions, Paul appeals to the acknowledged sentiments of Christians, of Jews, and of Heathens, on the subject of religious fellowship, 1 Cor. x. 16-23.

Beginning with the Christian sentiment on this subject, he says, "*The cup of blessing which we bless,*" &c.

The Apostle here refers to the fellowship of a christian church in the Lord's Supper. The Cup, in symbolical language, signifies that portion of good or evil which God in his providence deals out to men in this world, Ps. xxiii.

5, John xviii., 11. The Cup, in the Lord's Supper, is the symbol not of evil, but of good. It is "the cup of blessing"—an emblem of all the blessings of Salvation from sin and from wrath, by the shedding of that precious blood which it represents. This blood was shed to ratify or confirm the covenant of Salvation, in which God engages to be the God of his people, to write his law in their hearts, and to remember their sins no more. But the blood of Christ, not only, like the typical blood of the former economy, confirms and ratifies God's promises to his people, (see Exodus xxiv. 8,) but is itself the immediate procurer of all these blessings, see Matth. xxvi. 28, Eph. i. 7, Heb. ix. 11-16. With how much propriety, then, is the emblematic cup called the cup of blessing, as the memorial of that blood by which all the blessings that we have in possession or prospect, were procured for us and confirmed to us.

"Which we bless."—To bless, in scripture language, when man is the agent, signifies, to pray for God's blessing on, or to give him thanks on behalf of, the subjects referred to. From a comparison of all the passages in which the subject is mentioned it plainly appears that, at the original institution of the Supper, Christ simply gave thanks, Matth. xxvi. 26, 27, Mark xiv. 22, 23, Luke xxii. 19, 1 Cor. xi. 23-25. In comparing these passages let the reader observe, that where Matthew and Mark say Christ blessed, Luke says he gave thanks, which shews that both words in that connection mean the same thing, and that Paul, who received an account of it by revelation, and delivered that account to the Corinthians to correct the abuses of which they had been guilty, says Christ gave thanks. To bless, therefore, in the passage before us, as it refers to the same subject, must have the same meaning. Simple scriptural views of this subject are of high importance, to the right understanding of the

nature and design of this sacred institution. Not only have the Transubstantiation of the Pope, and the more mysterious, if less absurd, Consubstantiation of Luther taken their rise from the idea that the bread and wine, and not God, are the objects of the blessing here referred to, but even with many among ourselves, the idea still prevails, that the consecration prayer (as it is often called) communicates a mysterious, undefinable something to them, which makes them more sacred than before.

The language of the prayers, and of the addresses from the head of the table, not unfrequently tends to cherish these unscriptural ideas. When the prayer proceeds on the idea of a consecration, and in connection with this, the communicants are told that Jesus Christ is *now* set forth, crucified before their eyes—that they are now seeing and tasting and handling the word of life,* it must tend to cherish superstitious veneration for the elements to such a degree, as to mar their peace and joy, and to turn away their attention from the truth they are commemorating, to what they have among their hands. Whereas, when the blessing referred to is viewed as a solemn thanksgiving to God for the gift of his Son, we are led to consider the elements remaining precisely what they were before—bread and wine, and, simply as such, to be used as memorials of the death of Christ in the room of his people. This will appear still more evident when we consider, that the apostle does not refer exclusively to the presiding individual when he says, “*we bless*,” but to the

* My principal objection to the use of these passages in this connection is, that in their application to the elements in the Lord's Supper, they must be *accommodated*, and turned away from their original design, a practice which, however common, has, I am persuaded, done no little injury to Christianity. Besides, although some Christians of ~~superior~~ judgment may be able to understand and apply them aright, yet others, and perhaps the greater number, will always be liable to misunderstand and therefore to misapply them in this connection.

whole body of the Church presenting their united thanks to the Father of mercies for his unspeakable gift. Whatever virtue is attributed to what is called the consecration prayer, in communicating something sacred to the elements, is, from the highest to the lowest view of it, ascribed to the Minister, and not to the church; but here, the blessing is the joint action of the whole body. This gives a very different view of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, from the idea of the elements being constituted holy by the consecration of a Minister, and so becoming objects of religious veneration.

"*Is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?*"—The word communion or fellowship, for they both mean the same thing, signifies the joint action of a select number of individuals, in giving, receiving, or enjoying, that in which they have fellowship. Partaking of the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, being the joint action of the whole church, they all had fellowship together in that action. This was admitted; hence it followed by parity of reason, that, when Christians went into the Idol's Temple, and became partakers with idolaters, of the cup and of the table of Devils, (see 1 Cor. viii. 10,) they had visible fellowship with them in that social action! This could not be denied, without denying what Paul assumes as taken for granted; that in the Lord's Supper all the communicants had fellowship together.

One of the grand expedients by which not a few attempt to quiet their consciences, and to vindicate their conduct in eating the Lord's Supper with visible unbelievers, is to maintain that they have nothing to do with fellow-partakers—that they have to do with God *only*, it being a transaction *entirely* between God and the soul!! This sentiment is found so very convenient, that even public teachers have employed it to quiet the minds of Christ's disciples, when they begin to question the lawfulness of

being yoked together in fellowship with unbelievers! The parable of the tares among the wheat, Matth. xiii. 24-31, compare vs. 36-44, has been also wrested, and pressed into this service. It has been employed to teach the disciples of Christ, that it is the will of their Lord that the holy and profane should be united together in religious society, till he come at last to separate them.* But if, in eating the Lord's Supper, Christians have nothing to do with fellow worshippers, why were the Corinthians reprov'd and punished for eating it *in parties*?—why were they commanded to tarry one for another?—why should we not, like the Episcopal and Roman Churches, administer it in public to each individual separately, and in private to the sick and the dying?—why should not the Christian edify himself by eating it in his closet? To these questions no answer can be given, consistent with the common practice in Scotland, except, that it is an institution entirely social—a fellowship, that it is not intended for individuals, as such, but for associated bodies. But did the Lord intend that the holy and the profane—his friends and his enemies, should hold fellowship together in this feast of love? Certainly not! The Christian's mind revolts from the idea! What disciple would not shrink with horror from the thought of *holding fellowship* with the open enemies of his Lord in

* Any one who will take the Redeemer's explanation of his own language will see, that this parable was not intended to prohibit the separation of believers from the world in church fellowship. The field is the world as such, and not the church as distinct from the world. The prohibition refers to the well-known practice of rooting heretics out of the world, in place of simply putting them away from the church. In this view of the subject, the history of the church shews the vast importance of the prohibition. I would ask the reader if he thinks it possible, that Paul, when he says, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person," meant to overturn the precept of his Lord, when he says, "Let both grow together until harvest."

the sacred institution of the Supper ! Yet the distinction between joining with the ungodly at the table of the Lord, and having fellowship with them, is of their own, not of God's making ! If there be any meaning in the passage under review,—if there be any conclusiveness in the Apostle's reasoning, we hold fellowship with those with whom we eat the Lord's Supper, with those with whom we are associated in church fellowship. It may be thought, however, a matter of complete indifference, to have fellowship, even with unbelievers, in eating a little bread and tasting a little wine. And no doubt, apart from the nature and design of the fellowship, it is so. But it is not fellowship in a common meal. It is the fellowship of the body and blood of the Lord. It is by Christ's appointment, a visible symbolical representation, and on the part of communicants, a public declaration of their fellowship together in all the blessings of Redemption by his death. Hence it followed, that when any of the Christians in Corinth went to feast with idolaters in the Idol's Temple, they by their conduct declared, that they had fellowship with them in the participation of those blessings, supposed to be derived from the Idol, through the medium of the sacrifices on which they feasted ? On the very same principle, when Christians join in religious fellowship with unbelievers, they by their conduct declare, that they esteem them as fellow-partakers with them in all the blessings of pardon, sanctification, and eternal life ! And while this is the language of the Christian's conduct, it is in vain that he attempts, by any other means, to persuade them that it is not in his opinion. It is easy to see what a snare this may become to deluded souls, and what a widely extended mischief must result from its general adoption in what are called Christian countries. Unrenewed men love and cherish the deception which helps to keep their consciences easy while living

in sin—which says, peace, peace, while there is no peace; and surely of all means of deception, access to what are called church privileges,—fellowship with Christians in church connection, is the most extensively successful and efficacious! It may safely be asserted, indeed, that if profaneness and infidelity have slain their thousands, this snare of the Christian's making has slain its ten thousands. I would therefore entreat the Christian reader to inquire seriously, whether he be not found contributing to harden and ruin the souls of his fellow-sinners, by holding religious fellowship with them in this sacred institution, while he knows them to be living without God, and without hope in the world. Is it not deceitful—is it not cruel in the extreme, to contribute, to foster in their minds an opinion which you know is false, which you know will prove ruinous to their souls? You will perhaps be disposed to reply, "we are not authorised to judge the heart." So say I. But *we are required to judge the life, and from the life to infer the state of the heart.* "By their fruits ye shall know them."

When I see a man forming his conduct by the precepts of the gospel, I am bound to recognise him as a child of God; but when I see one treating these with indifference, I am warranted to conclude that, "there is no fear of God before his eyes;" for "a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit." This objection, then, only indicates indisposition to obey this part of the will of Christ.

But the word fellowship signifies, not only a joint, but also a mutual action; consisting in giving and receiving, Phil. iv. 15. This is evidently implied here, and is necessary to support the apostle's reasoning. When any of the Christians in Corinth went into the idol's temple, they not only had fellowship with idolaters, but also with the objects of idolatrous worship, in professedly receiving from them those blessings which they were supposed to

confer on their worshippers. Hence, says Paul, "the Gentiles sacrifice to devils and not to God, and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils:" intimating that the worshippers were supposed to have fellowship with their gods, (whom he here calls devils or demons), through the medium of the worship which they presented. To shew them that this was the language of their conduct when they joined with idolaters, the apostle reminds them of the acknowledged principles of Christians in regard to the Lord's Supper:—that they had fellowship, not only with each other, but also with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Here God the Father is brought to their remembrance as having given them "the bread of heaven;" the Son as having "given himself for them:" while they receive with joy, and remember with gratitude, the inestimable favour,—the gift of sovereign, free, eternal love. In this ordinance, then, God is represented as freely bestowing, and communicants as gratefully receiving, blessings of inestimable value,—of essential importance. Hence is it a lively, a striking representation, that "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," as well as with one another, in the enjoyment of the common salvation. How unseemly, then—what an insult to Divine Majesty—what an obscuring of its meaning—what a perversion of its design—what a marring of its beauty, to see Christ's disciples sitting together at the table of the Lord with the unholy and profane, with the drunkard, the swearer, the unclean, with the mere man of the world, or at best the mere moralist—with those who have no faith in Jesus, no love to his people, no regard to his authority—joining with them in an institution designed to exhibit to the world the fellowship of the disciples of Jesus in the common salvation: and their fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ in giving and receiving that salvation!

"The bread which we break, is it not the communion, (or fellowship), of the body of Christ."—As in the whole of this passage, the apostle in speaking of the joint action of the church in observing the Lord's Supper, the breaking here spoken of refers, not to the action of the President before distributing the bread, but to that of the church in eating it. Accordingly, to break bread is to eat the Lord's Supper, Acts ii. 42. and xx. 7. Fellowship in the body and in the blood of the Lord seems to be essentially the same; yet both in John vi. and at the institution of the Supper, Christ maintains a distinction between them. Perhaps the breaking of his body may signify his sufferings in general, and the shedding of his blood, the issue of these sufferings in death, with its effect in procuring pardon for the people; for "without shedding of blood there was no remission." Neither death unaccompanied with suffering, (see Heb. ii. 10.) nor suffering that did not terminate in death, would have delivered the guilty from the curse of the law. They must have been both united in procuring salvation. Hence, as meat and drink are the essential ingredients in the sustenance of man, so Christ says, "my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed;" intimating that he possesses in himself every thing necessary to a complete salvation.

"For we, being many, are one bread and one body, &c."—The translation of this verse is unintelligible. Christians are often represented as one body, but never as one bread. The apostle's meaning evidently is, (and it will bear to be so rendered,) "Because the bread, (or loaf,) is one, we the many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread, or loaf." The apostle's design in this verse is to show, that the very external form of the Lord's Supper is intended by Christ, to exhibit the unity of the church as one body, serving one Lord, obeying

one code of laws, enjoying common privileges, holding similar sentiments, entertaining similar hopes, and pursuing similar conduct. In short, that as the one broken loaf represents the one suffering Saviour, so the joint participation of the whole body of communicants in that one loaf, represents their fellowship together in the common salvation. Nor is it possible for all the ingenuity and sophistry of man, to force any other consistent meaning on the passage, nor indeed on any account we have in Scripture of the nature and design of this important institution.

Will the Christian then affirm, that it is not a social institution—a fellowship—that he has nothing to do with fellow communicants? However apparently solemn and devout its observation, if the worshippers acknowledge not union and fellowship together as one associated body, *it is not the Lord's Supper*, but a mere caricature—a delusive imitation! The apostle's argument requires that, even in the idolatrous festivals of the heathen, there was a visible union, and acknowledged fellowship among the worshippers, and much more surely in the social institution of the Lord's Supper. But where is the exhibition of the one body of Christ in those societies, where the great mass of communicants, are indisputably living without God in the world, and the few Christians among them, driven to the miserable shift of asserting that they have nothing to do with fellow worshippers, in an institution manifestly social! In what a pitiable plight is the Christian placed, when driven to the alternative of either perverting the nature and design of the ordinance, by observing it as a solitary individual, or of holding religious fellowship with the open enemies of his Lord. Where is the exhibition of the unity of the body of Jesus in the Lord's Supper, when some of the communicants are at the table, others of them looking on, others walking the

streets or the fields, and others perhaps refreshing themselves, either at home, or in the houses of friends whom they visit, or in public-houses ! Is this a visible exhibition of fellowship in the Lord's Supper ! Is this what the Apostle means when he says, "*we the many are one body*" — "*when ye come together to eat tarry one for another*" ? I would beseech the Christian reader, to compare these practices with the Bible account of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, and see how far they agree. Is it likely in the nature of things that Christ meant to address his enemies, or even his friends and his enemies promiscuously, when he says, "This do in remembrance of me !" You dare not say so. *You know* that he meant to address his friends and *his friends only*. You know that his friends, and only his friends, *can remember his death*. You know that his friends, and only his friends, *feel any interest in his death*. On what principle, then, or by what authority, do you join with his enemies, in, I will not say the observance, but the prostitution of this sacred ordinance ? Can you say that you have the authority of Christ for your conduct ? No : if you take the Bible for your guide, you cannot. Are you not contributing to ensnare the souls of deluded sinners by the countenance you give them ? *Are you not eating and drinking unworthily* when you contribute to prostitute and profane the emblems of the body and blood of the Lord ? Did you ever pay any attention to the inspired precepts ? "Be not unequally yoked together (in fellowship) with unbelievers."* "Come out from among them and be separate :—" "Be not partaker of other men's sins." These precepts are as binding

* This passage, (2 Cor. vi. 14—18,) refers principally to church fellowship, though marriage and other dangerous connexions may be included. It is of the church ~~as such~~ that Paul says, Ye are the temple of the living God; and it is in that God promises to walk, see Levit. xvi. 12. Math. xviii. 20.

on Christ's disciples as any in the Bible. He that said, "Do this in remembrance of me," said also, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs."

I am aware that many will be disposed to dismiss the whole subject with this summary reply,—“Evils and improprieties occur in those societies that profess separation from the world, as well as in those that make no such profession.” It is admitted. Evils took place in the apostolic churches, and evils will take place in every society, while the human heart remains what it is. But is there no difference between those evils that result from the remaining ignorance and wickedness of the subjects of grace, and those that are radical and essential in the very constitution of religious societies? Is there no difference between those evils that occasionally accompany the execution of the laws of Christ, and those that arise from the total neglect of discipline, or rather the impossibility of bringing the laws of Christ to bear on the professing multitudes who pay no regard to them, who scarcely acknowledge their authority? The one class of evils is inseparable from the present state of humanity, the other from the vain attempt to constitute a worldly society a Christian church. Improper characters under a hypocritical profession, obtained a place in the apostolic churches; but as soon as they discovered themselves they were put away. The same thing will happen still. But while the churches require of those they admit a credible profession, look diligently lest any among them fail of the grace of God, and put away hypocrites and self-deceivers when they discover themselves; this is all they can do, all that is required. God's own people occasionally fall into sin, and so bring leanness into their souls, grief on their brethren, and reproach on their profession; but the application of discipline, by the blessing of God, brings them to repentance, and restores them to the confidence and fel-

lowship of their brethren. But this is very different from the common practice of receiving all, or almost all, who choose to apply, and of retaining all who choose to continue, with little or no regard to character or conduct. Let the disciples of Christ, then, remember their obligation to turn away from every society in which his institutions are prostituted and profaned by the indiscriminate admission of all sorts of characters to partake of them; and to associate with fellow disciples in the fellowship of the gospel, to whatever inconvenience it may expose them. Thus only can they serve God acceptably. *Thus only can they enjoy the pleasure and the profit of Christian fellowship.*

Let the churches of Christ remember, that while they approve the sentiments and observe the practice here recommended, it becomes them to look to themselves. "God desireth truth in the inward parts." He will have his worshippers "to worship him in spirit and in truth." But it is very possible to observe all the ordinances of the Gospel, regularly and scripturally, and yet be destitute of this truth. The first question therefore with every professing Christian should be, not with what denomination am I in fellowship, what system of ordinances do I observe, but what is my state before God? Have I as a guilty sinner, without help or hope from any other quarter, come to God through Jesus Christ, for pardoning mercy, and justifying grace: and has my belief in God's pardoning mercy, led me to devote myself unreservedly to him, to live and die to his glory? It is in this state alone, that a sinner can observe church ordinances with acceptance before God, or with advantage to himself.

Again, "let us not be high-minded but fear." When we compare our own order and system of ordinances with those of others around us, we are not without danger of being lifted up with pride by the contrast. Self-righteous-

ness has many an avenue to the depraved heart, and our church order is very liable to become one of them.

Lastly, brethren, "let us love one another." Our sentiments and practice require this : and failing in this, we act infinitely more inconsistently than those whose practice we condemn. Appearing every Lord's day around our Father's board, feasting on the riches of his love, professing to be but one body, members one of another, can we but esteem, can we but love one another ? Let us see, however, that we "love not in word and in tongue, but indeed and in truth ;" for "hereby shall we assure our hearts before God." But "if our heart condemn us of want of love to the brethren, we cannot enjoy scriptural confidence toward God." Our observance of scriptural ordinances is not the end, it is only a means to the end. It is intended to carry forward our purity, our spirituality, our love to God and to our brethren ; and in proportion as our system of ordinances is more simple and scriptural than that of others, in proportion ought we to strive to excel them in these its native—its intended effects. "Finally brethren, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

To conclude, the death of Christ, which his disciples are bound to commemorate in their social meetings, is proclaimed to all men for the obedience of faith. Christ died to save the guilty from the wrath of God ; and whosoever believeth in him shall never perish ; for his blood cleanseth from all sin. But perhaps my reader is one of the numerous class, who by taking the Sacrament once or twice in the year, by a punctual observance of fast and other preaching days, and by a few prayers presented on these occasions, hopes to please God, and to escape the wrath to come ! Remember, my fellow-sinner, who has said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the

kingdom of God." The Lord's Supper is designed only for the children of God—for the disciples of Christ. To them only it is of any use. The disciples of Christ are one spirit with him, walk as he also walked—love and obey him—are not conformed to this world, in its maxims and practices; but take his word as the guide of all their conduct. Is this the case with you? Do you love the Saviour? Do you wish in all things to know and do his will? If not, you have neither part nor lot in God's Salvation; and your observance of fasts and Sacraments, instead of procuring for you the favor of God, is heaping up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God! There is only one Saviour, even Jesus. He that cometh to him will not be rejected. If you believe in him you shall be made free—free from guilt and condemnation, you shall become the subject of sanctifying grace—you shall be fitted and enabled to observe all the ordinances of the gospel with acceptance—you shall enjoy all the privileges of a child of God. In short, you shall be blessed in life, safe in death, and happy in eternity. But if you believe not in him, you perish for ever; and your mock observance of Sacraments and fasts, will only augment your guilt, and add to your final misery. Hear then the voice of divine mercy sounding in the gospel—"As I live saith the Lord I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he should return from his ways and live,—turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die saith the Lord God."

Congregationalism:

ITS CHARACTER AND CLAIMS.

THE Presbyterian form of church government has long prevailed in Scotland. In its early struggles with Episcopacy, the mind of the nation was all but unanimous in its favour. Having been incorporated with the State in this part of the island, the people have been long trained under its ministrations, and, till the present century, there has appeared no rival to its claims likely to gain much favour. The various secessions from the church established by law, and supported by the State, which have occurred within the last hundred years, still retain the Presbyterian form, and are, to this day as attached to it as those from whom they separated. Matters are very different in England. Many of the dissenters from the Established church there are Congregationalists. The Presbyterians are few, and consist in a great degree of Scotchmen, or their descendants, who continue to prefer the forms of worship and church order, to which they had been accustomed in their father-land.

About the beginning of the present century, many pious people in Scotland had their attention turned to the nature of a scriptural church. The consequence was, that many conscientious and enlightened christian people left the church of the Establishment, and other Presbyterian communions, and formed themselves into churches upon the Congregational model. These churches, are at present upwards of a hundred in number. They are found in all the cities and large towns in Scotland. They are scattered over the length and breadth of the land. Their preachers have penetrated into the remotest and most neglected districts, and, through their efforts, the

gospel has been preached in many parts of the Highlands and islands, where, but for their services, the people must have long remained beyond the reach of the glad sound of salvation.

In addition to these churches of the Congregational order holding paedobaptist sentiments, there are also not a few others observing the same order, and as rigidly adhering to what they consider to be the apostolic model, of the anti-paedobaptist persuasion. And before the rise of those modern churches, there were a number of small christian societies, known by the name of the *Old Independents*, as distinguished from those of more recent origin. It is not the design of these pages to trace the history of such churches, but to enter upon the brief examination of a subject, which their actual existence among us must often suggest to an inquiring and observant mind. What are the respective claims of the Presbyterian and Congregational forms of church government? What sanction does the New Testament give to the one rather than to the other, and by what authority may the latter intrude upon ground so long occupied by the former?

It may not be superfluous here to make the obvious remark, that questions of religious truth and duty are not to be determined by their prevalence in this or that locality or by the date of their adoption. Had the doctrines of the Reformation been tested, when Luther arose, by the number of those who adhered to them, the system of Popery could have shown an overwhelming majority; and so the errors of the many would have borne down the truth recently found by the few. In like manner, were the claims of Presbyterianism and Congregationalism to be decided by the priority of their appearance in any particular place, it would follow that the one might be scriptural and right in Scotland, and the other in England, both true in America, and neither in Sweden. It is surely needless to expose by argument the falsehood of the principle, that in religion the soundness of a creed,

or the correctness of a practice, is to be determined by its antiquity, unless we go back to the highest christian antiquity—the apostolic age ; or by its prevalence, unless it can be shown that doctrines are popular in proportion as they are scriptural—and gain favour with men in proportion as they savour of the simplicity that is in Christ. That we may be able to answer the question, what are the respective claims of the two forms of church government and order before us, it will first be necessary to examine what are the distinctive peculiarities of each.

It might be thought that no intelligent member, either of a Presbyterian or Congregational church, could remain ignorant of the real points of difference between the respective bodies ; and yet, to an astonishing degree, ignorance does prevail. Were the question put, What is the chief distinguishing peculiarity between the two systems, many would at once reply, that the Congregationists insist upon evidence of true conversion to God, as necessary qualification for membership, while the Presbyterians require no more than a “*credible profession*,” meaning by this phrase, a competent measure of christian knowledge, and a good moral character. Without stopping for the present to examine the accuracy of these terms, or the precise import of them, as used and understood by the respective parties, it is to be observed, that purity of communion, or a pretension to it, may be a characteristic mark of the one party or the other, but is not *necessarily* the distinctive peculiarity of either. The difference between the two systems consists in this, that the government of a Presbyterian church is vested in the minister and elders constituting the Session ;—in the Presbytery, consisting of the ministers within the bounds, and one ruling elder from each parish or congregation, deputed by his brethren ;—of the Synod, composed of the presbyteries, and constituting, in the various bodies that have seceded from the Church of Scotland, their highest court of review, while in the Church of Scotland itself and in the Free Church there is the General Assembly, formed

CONGREGATIONALISM :

of representatives both lay and clerical, from all the Presbyteries within the jurisdiction of the Church. To the General Assembly, appeals can be carried from the lower judicatory, and its decisions are final, unless the matter be removed out of the Church altogether, and carried to the House of Lords.

In Congregational churches, all the members, with the pastors and deacons, in their own persons administer their own church affairs. The nature of ordination, and the powers conferred by it, Presbyterians regard in a different light from Congregationalists. The former say, that the power of ordaining belongs exclusively to the pastors of the church, and neither solely nor conjointly to the christian people. (*Brown's vindication of the Presbyterian form of Church Government.*) The latter maintain, that without the previous choice or consent of the church over which a pastor is to preside, no act or ordination can invest him with office or authority in the church.

Acknowledging no ecclesiastical power but itself, each church claims the entire control of its own concerns, and of course surrenders all claim of right to interfere authoritatively in the decisions of any other church. There is consequently no right of appeal from the decision of the church to any higher tribunal, no representative government, and no ecclesiastical supremacy—all being subject to Christ the great Head of the church, and to Him alone.

From this statement it appears, that the differences between the two schemes are of no small importance. They seriously affect the rights and duties of the people, as well as the rank and prerogatives of the clergy. If the bishops, or pastors, and elders ought to exercise sole authority in the church, the members of the church having neither voice nor vote in their assemblies, then it must be the usurpation of a right not belonging to them, which members of Congregational churches claim, when they deliberate and decide upon the admission and exclusion of members, and every other matter of discipline,

arrangement, or enterprise, connected with the body. On the other hand, if the members of the church have a right to hear, judge, and determine for themselves in all such matters, then it must be an act of gross injustice to deprive them of the right; and for the ministers and elders to take the entire rule into their own hands, must be to exercise a spiritual despotism utterly foreign to the genius of the gospel, and subversive of the great principles of the Protestant Reformation. That Reformation rescued from the hands of a dominant hierarchy, a usurped power over the consciences, liberties and lives of the people. So far as its principles were recognised and acted upon, it gave the people duties to perform, and rights to enjoy. They were no longer ciphers to swell the value of the clerical units that stood at their head, but had individual importance, and individual responsibility, and collective power.* It is but justice to Congregationalism to add, that it maintains the independence of the Church upon the State—rejects, therefore, the theory of a National Church—declines all government grants, or endowments, because these more or less involve the right of State interference and control—denies the right of the civil magistrate to exercise any jurisdiction within the church, and guards the interests of religious liberty with equal jealousy against the encroachments of sacerdotal assumption, and of secular power.

The question, then, between Presbyterians and Congregationalist, being one which involves interests so important, is surely one on which the New Testament may be expected to throw a clear and satisfactory light: and to that authority alone must the appeal be made. If it be the will of Christ that the government of his church should be vested in spiritual courts, rising in regular gradation of power, and extent of jurisdiction from the Kirk Session, whose acts reach only to one congregation,

* See the subject touched upon in the foregoing paragraph, fully illustrated in the Tract entitled, "What is a Church of Christ?"

to the Synod or General Assembly, whose authority is acknowledged over an entire region, we should naturally expect to find the clear traces of this system in the inspired statute book of his kingdom. There must be a *jus divinum* for it, otherwise it has no claims upon christian men beyond those of mere expediency. If, however, the great lines of another and a simpler form of Church Government are actually drawn in the New Testament, then THAT must be adopted in preference to all the schemes which the wisdom of man may have devised, or the power of man may have enforced, or the ambition and pride and presumption of man may have sought to impose, under the sanction of divine authority.

It is in the highest degree improbable that Christ has left a subject of such importance to be determined according to the ever-varying and often-erring judgments of men. We may therefore consult the New Testament in regard to it, in the confident hope that if we do so, with a single eye, we shall assuredly learn the will of the Lord.

There are few defenders of the Presbyterian polity who now maintain the *jus divinum* principle, and therefore it is unnecessary to enter upon the formal examination of the arguments from scripture. But if that ground be really abandoned, it is enough to say of any other that may be resorted to, that it is confessedly suspicious and untenable. One author, (Brown) whose work in vindication of the Presbyterian form of church government has long been considered the palladium of the sect, has said, that "he has no wish that presbytery should be retained any farther than it can be supported by scripture, and the moment that it is proved that it cannot be so supported, he will be happy to see that it is rejected by the world." (Intro. p. 7.) This is nobly said, and yet it is artfully said ; for it is fitted to inspire readers with the same confidence in the scriptural goodness of the cause which seems to have dictated it ; and though the author has been long since driven from his main positions, he never acknowledged the fact. Presbytery has not been without able

advocates since the time of the author here referred to, but they cannot be reviewed here. He must be a hardy man who will now undertake to prove that the Presbyterian Courts of Review from the Kirk Session to the General Assembly are framed according to a divine model; that one church has a divine pattern for interfering authoritatively with the proceedings and decisions of another—that the ministers and elders, with or without consent or sanction of the members of the church, constitute the rightful judicatory in all ecclesiastical matters—and that the office-bearers either alone, or along with the people, have a right to legislate in Christ's Church. It would be strange, indeed, to pretend to be able to produce a warrant from Christ's own word, to invade his prerogative and usurp his office as sole Lawgiver and King. It is safer and easier to rest such claims on the ground of expediency. The fifteenth chapter of Acts used to be referred to as containing proof, that in the primitive church there were assemblies called, for the decision of questions from churches. Congregationalists reply that this might be granted and yet that chapter be appealed to in vain as authority for the gradation of sessions, presbyteries and synods—as authority for there being a representative for every church or congregation, or presbytery interested in the question—as authority for considering one portion or section of the church subordinate to another. In short, unless the Presbyterian Courts of Review correspond to the assembly of apostles and elders at Jerusalem *in every point* as their divine model, it is vain for them to plead for the Church Courts of presbytery as deriving any countenance from this portion of scripture.

The limits of this tract demand compression, and instead of discussing and refuting the arguments sometimes adduced for the divine right of presbytery, we may arrive by a shorter road at our conclusion, by simply stating the leading characteristics of that system, and exhibiting the corresponding features of Congregationalism; we shall then leave the reader, after comparing the two, to say

which of them is commended to his judgment and conscience as conformable to the mind of Christ.

1. Presbytery gives undue power to the clergy, and, of course, by doing so, deprives the people of their just rights. Even the lay members of the presbytery—the elders, are in the nomination of the ministers, so that even as representatives of the congregation, they are not chosen by those for whom they act.* Nor are they responsible to the congregation for any of their proceedings. This is certainly a direct violation of the apostolical precedent, as shown in the election of the deacons of the church at Jerusalem, (see Acts vi. 3.) “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. *And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and THEY CHOSE Stephen,*” &c.

2. Presbytery assumes the power of making laws, enforcing obedience, framing standards, creeds and confessions; requiring subscription and adherence under pains and penalties.—And so

3. Presbytery brings all that profess it under obligation to obey other laws than those of Christ—enforces compliance with human regulations under the sanction of ecclesiastical authority, and so accounts resistance to statutes of man's framing, as resistance to the ordinance of God. This may be viewed either as elevating human authority to a level with divine, or bringing down the authority of Christ to an equality with that of his servants, to whom he has delegated no powers to make laws in his house, or to exercise lordship over his heritage.

4. Presbytery, by admitting the principle and practice of appeal to higher ecclesiastical courts, violates the spirit

* We believe that in some presbyterian communities, this evil is in the course of being corrected, and that the voice of the people is permitted to be heard in the election of elders.

of submission to the decision of christian brethren, which Christ enjoins, subverts the authority of each church in governing and exercising discipline upon its own members, and often renders nugatory the sentence of the church compelling the members of it to hold fellowship with those who have been adjudged unworthy of the privilege; and, by consequence, tempting the church to bear with them that are evil, and to connive at known offences against the laws of Christ, under the consciousness of inability to enforce compliance with them.

5. Presbytery, whether endowed or unendowed, established by law, or in separation from the establishment, recognises by its standards, the right of the civil magistrate to maintain, by the power of the sword, the *true religion*—meaning by that term—*itself*. It is, therefore, in its spirit hostile to religious liberty; and although disarmed, and therefore impotent, yet, until it renounce the tenet of the right of appeal to the secular power to uphold and defend the truth, it must be regarded as virtually denying the pure spirituality of Christ's kingdom, and its independence of the kingdom of this world.*

It may be said that characters are here ascribed to Presbytery which are not essential to it, but may happen to be adjuncts or peculiarities of certain existing Presbyterian churches; and that these may be objectionable, or given up as indefensible, while the system itself may stand clear of all blame.

On this one or two observations are offered:—

1. It may be admitted that some part of the above objections to Presbytery may attach only to certain sections of the Presbyterian church; but it is with the system, as we see it embodied in existing communities, that we must take its likeness, and not according to some ideal church freed from all the evils which actually adhere

* Some sections of the Presbyterian Churches in this country object to the article in the Confession of Faith respecting the power of the civil magistrate in religion; and so they fall not under this charge.

more or less to every church framed according to the model in question.

2. There are two ways in which the difference between Presbyterians and Congregationalists may be viewed,—theoretically and practically.

If we look simply at the *principles* of the respective parties, we must say that Presbyterianism does not *necessarily* require that its adherents seek State support, or that they set up standards of doctrine, or demand subscription to creeds and confessions, or that they substitute a nominal profession of christianity for a well authenticated and sustained *credible* profession, as the requisite for communion; or that they are lax in the exercise of discipline. On the other hand, it is *not essential* to Congregational principles that churches formed on that plan abjure creeds, or that they be rigid in the requirement of evidence of conversion as a necessary qualification for church membership, or that they be strict in discipline, prompt in applying the laws of Christ to every case as it occurs—but if we regard the *practice* of the respective bodies, we may be led to see that, generally speaking, Presbyterians do adopt confessions of faith, repudiate the practice of requiring evidence of conversion to God as the qualification for admission to communion with the church, and are lax in the exercise of discipline. Many Presbyterians, at the same time, hold it to be the duty of the government to endow *their* church, and divide the land among them as the portion of their inheritance, recognising their own ministers, and them only as the legitimate and duly authorized religious teachers of the people!

Again, if we look at Congregational churches, and see them adhering to the inspired volume as their sole and sufficient standard of doctrine and duty—if we see them maintaining purity of communion as a principle, and in practice so adhering to it, that how much soever they may be occasionally deceived in the admission of individuals unworthy of christian fellowship, they are kept few,

and poor, and unpopular, because they will not purchase influence and respectability, and the friendship of the world, by widening the door of admission to their fellowship—if, moreover, they decline, on principle, the acceptance of government endowments, and if they do all this in strict conformity with their professed adherence to what they believe to be the apostolical model of church government and discipline, we can draw an inference from the practice as well as from the theory of the respective parties. And what is that inference? It is that the spirit of the two systems of ecclesiastical polity is different—that the one is favourable to scriptural purity, to strictness of discipline, to reverential regard to “the law and the testimony” as the only rule and standard; while the other, being fenced about with human contrivances to preserve purity of doctrine and practice, is in greater danger of substituting form and profession for the power and vitality of the truth—is lax in admission to communion—slow to exercise discipline, and, in attempting it, cramped and cumbered by the machinery of its church courts and right of appeal to judicatories, removing the decision of questions to judges who can exercise no moral control over the parties subjected to their jurisdiction, and little interested in them.

Of Congregationalism, moreover, it may truly be said, that purity of communion is *essential* to the proper working of the system. A church formed on that model is ruled solely by the laws of Christ, carried into effect with the concurrent sanction of the members of the church themselves, not by representatives or delegates. The laws of Christ's house are adapted to a society of believers—of regenerated men—and *can* be observed by them; but in a congregation composed of other elements—of unconverted men and women—they *cannot* be observed—they would be found quite unsuited to such a community, and the administration of them would soon be found utterly impracticable. The laws of Christ are spiritual; a church of spiritual men can understand them, and sub-

mit to them, and apply them ; and a Congregational church in which purity of communion is preserved, finds its high privilege and true prosperity invariably connected with the maintenance of the laws of the Lord and Master in all their divine authority.

There is nothing, however, in the constitution of a Presbyterian church, ruled by a kirk session, and held together by other bonds than those of christian love, and mutual confidence, to prevent the working of its machinery, though purity of communion were quite disregarded. It may be composed of persons who do not profess to recognise each other as true believers, but only as nominal professors, and as they are not required to take any part in church matters, that being left to the ecclesiastical court, they have nothing to do as church members for which they feel themselves disqualified ; and they are not taught any mutual duties of watchfulness over each other—nor the exercise of any discipline, nor any responsibility for the proper spirit and deportment of their fellow members of the congregation—all such things being left to their ecclesiastical rulers, and whether performed or omitted, are regarded as no concerns of theirs. In short, this system is quite well adapted to a worldly society, and needs neither holy materials nor a vigilant oversight to keep all in due order and form. But a Congregational church, unless composed of real Christians, and its affairs administered in the true spirit of christian faithfulness, purity and love, must speedily fall into confusion, and if a remedy be not promptly applied must go to pieces, exemplifying the maxim, that the best things when corrupted become the worst.

This statement, if correct, (and we invite our readers to examine its correctness), may warrant us to submit a question, which might go far to determine the conflicting claims of Presbyterianism and Congregationalism to be the form which Christ intended his churches to assume. If of two schemes of church government, it can be affirmed and proved, that the one can be carried on, all its forms

attended to, and its working uninterrupted, although the laws of Christ be neglected, and although the parties concerned be not true Christians ; while of the other scheme it is equally demonstrable that its working is practicable only on the supposition that the members of the churches are, so far as human judgment can discover, converted persons, living under the influence of the truth, and obedient in all things—which of these two schemes tried by this test must we conclude to be the right one ? Surely that to which purity of communion is essential, and to which promiscuous admission to ordinances, and laxity of discipline would be fatal. We cannot hesitate a moment which has the better claim to be regarded as that which has the Divine sanction. The one can flourish and extend just as true believers multiply. The other may spread itself over an entire region, and embrace the mass of the population within its pale, whether they be real Christians or only nominal professors. The one will be according to the model of the churches in Judea, to which believers in the Lord were added ; the other a worldly society baptized with a christian name.

These pages are written less with a view to unhinge the minds of Presbyterians in regard to their form of church polity, than to confirm Congregationalists in theirs. It has been the character of the churches of the latter denomination, to be more zealous to make converts from the world, than to make proselytes from other sections of the christian church ; but many of the members of the Congregational churches have become converts and proselytes at the same time. Many such having been connected with Presbyterian congregations while yet unconverted, the question of church government gave them no concern, until their eyes were opened to see their dangers as sinners, and the way of salvation through the blood of the cross. Then they perceived the spiritual nature of Christ's Church as composed of disciples like themselves, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and renewed in the spirit of their minds. Christian fellowship with genuine disciples

as a body, they could not enjoy where they were, though individual believers might belong to their congregation ; and therefore they joined a church composed of materials such as Paul referred to when he spake of "gold, silver, precious stones," composing the spiritual fabric he and his fellow-labourers were rearing to be a habitation of God through the Spirit—men and women who gave evidence that they were believers in Christ, having received the faithful word, and abiding in it, bringing forth fruit unto God. It is the fashion with some who belong to the State Church, and other communions that cannot plead the rule of scripture for their ecclesiastical order, to pretend that the mere outward form of the church is a matter of comparatively small importance—that it is but the scaffolding of the building, and that if pure doctrine and holy practice be maintained, all is well. We admit the relative inferiority of questions of church order to the vital doctrines of the christian system, but we demur to the figure of the *scaffolding*. We are rather disposed to regard the form of church government as corresponding to the *plan of the house*—the arrangement of the apartments suited to the offices, duties, and privileges of the inmates and the great purposes of Him who is the Lord of the house—the church of the living God ; and if HE has drawn the plan, it is at our peril if we alter it.

The readers of these pages are reminded in conclusion, that whatever be their professed principles in regard to church order, their belonging to the purest and most scriptural church on earth, will stand them in no stead in that day when Christ shall sit as a refiner of silver, and purge out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity unless they are truly His. Then he will judge men not by their profession, but by their character ; not by what they have been called, but by what they are in truth and reality.

Meeting a man who gives no evidence of being a Christian, we should never think it worth while to inquire what were his opinions on the subject of church govern-

ment, nor to set him right if we thought him wrong. We should rather press upon him the necessity of belonging to the true Church of Christ himself. With these views, Congregationalists would think it but a small point gained to have succeeded in convincing an unbeliever who professed Presbyterian principles, that the other was the more scriptural form. O, what avail scriptural opinion either in matters of doctrine, or in points of church order, while they are *mere* opinions! and when there is no repentance towards God, nor faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, what will it profit to have arrived at correct views of the scriptural form of church government! Seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof—seek to have a name and a place in it, and be not satisfied with merely speculative notions of what it is.

Thus would we address every inquirer—and commend this attempt to explain and enforce some points touching upon the scriptural order of the Church of Christ to His benediction, and to the serious attention of all into whose hands these pages may come.

Finally, we would remind our brethren who profess Congregational principles, that they will in vain seek to convince Presbyterians of the superior excellence of their scheme of church polity, unless they can point to the superior purity of life and consistency of character of the members of churches formed on what they deem the scriptural model. The best argument, that our churches are formed on the New Testament pattern, will be their being distinguished for New Testament purity, love, zeal, and holy activity, seeking to diffuse the savour of Christ around them. Thus did the primitive churches approve themselves, by their unfeigned faith and holy deeds, adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour. Unless we can appeal to such credentials, that our churches are scriptural churches, no one will care for our pretensions, drawn from our boasted strictness of discipline, or simplicity of order, or rigid adherence to scriptural forms. Unless we surpass Presbyterian churches in purity, con-

sistency, zeal and love, we may spare ourselves the trouble of inviting a comparison of their claims with our own; for, if ours be the more scriptural scheme of church polity, our love should glow with a warmer flame, our light should shine with a clearer lustre, and "without controversy" we should be acknowledged as churches walking in the beauty of holiness, adorned with the graces of the Spirit, and glorious in the eyes of the Lord.



CHURCH STANDARDS.

LETTER

FROM A

CONGREGATIONALIST TO A CHURCHMAN.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You ask me with an air of surprise how I could venture to unite with a body, not only differing so widely in its constitution from the Presbyterian church, but which gives no public pledge of orthodoxy, such as our forefathers deemed essential to the purity of a Christian church and to its safety from the inroads of heresy. I do not at all wonder that you should, on the latter ground, so strongly object to the course which I have adopted. I at one time felt the force of the objection as powerfully as you can do, nor did I, let me assure you, adopt any summary mode of disposing of it. I had every inducement on this as on other grounds to defend my position, and could I have done so to the satisfaction of my own understanding and conscience, I should certainly not now be the apologist of what with unfeigned sincerity I once condemned. The agitation of the voluntary controversy, I am free to acknowledge, produced an entire change in my mode of thinking on religious subjects. I had not been accustomed to refer to the word of God in defence of my religious principles; much less had I impressed upon my mind the importance of maintaining that divine truth, as revealed in the Scriptures, is the only perfect rule of faith and practice. Having, therefore, been driven in the defence of my views of ecclesiastical polity to the Bible, as the only source of authority and law, I was led naturally, and indeed inevitably, to submit to the same test my views on collateral subjects, with the firm determination to defend nothing, however hallowed to my associations, except what should appear, according to the best of my judgment, to be warranted by divine revelation. I shall not trouble you with a detail of the circumstances which led me first to doubt the

necessity or expediency of church standards. It will be enough that I briefly state to you the process by which I arrived at the conclusion, that I could with perfect safety and consistency unite with a denomination which not only disclaimed the use of these so-called safeguards of orthodoxy and uniformity, but actually esteemed them as unnecessary, nay, pernicious.

I had never heard of church standards being pleaded for on the ground of scripture precept, or example; though, from the importance attached to them by those bodies who hold them, the contrary might be expected. They are pleaded for on the ground of expediency and necessity. Now, I at once allow that many things are both expedient and necessary, for which we have no direct precept or example in the word of God; but such things will always be found in harmony with the *spirit* of divine truth. In the outset of my enquiries, it seemed to me very like implying a reflection upon divine truth as imperfect, to plead for the necessity of human compositions occupying the place which church standards do. I, therefore, was led to inquire, What are church standards, and whence arises their necessity? Here my inquiries branched into the following particulars:—

1. *Are they a plainer and clearer statement of the leading truths of the Bible than is given in the Bible itself?*

They do not profess to be a translation of any portion of the word of God; they imply, therefore, no reflection upon the received English version as such. If they are held to contain the leading principles of the bible better arranged and expressed, and in a manner less liable to perversion, than in the bible itself, it is implied directly, that words which man's wisdom teacheth are better than those in which it seemed good to the Holy Spirit to convey to men a knowledge of the will and character of God. Such an implication, those who plead for the necessity of standards would at once deny. I would not urge it, then, more especially seeing that there is not a scriptural principle expressed in any standards, with which I am acquainted, which is not found as clearly and explicitly stated in the bible itself as language can admit of. It would be strange indeed, and involving an imputation of defective wisdom on the part of God, if a revelation intended for all should not in its great leading disclosures be intelligible to all.

2. *Are they expositions of divine truth?*

Then, as the works of fallible men, they must be fallible. I may consistently subscribe to an exposition while it accords with my judgment; but can I, with a distinct recognition of human fallibility, pledge myself never to teach any thing contrary to that exposition? Am I bound to conclude, that the authors of the standards arrived at the perfect exposition of divine truth, and that my private judgment is never to lead to any other conclusion than that to which in any case they may have come? Am I to deny the possibility of error, deny that there is a progress in the knowledge of truth, and that some of the principles which I have solemnly bound myself to adhere to and to teach may possibly be erroneous? Can I recognise authority in any human exposition, and yield to that authority without giving up the main principles of Protestantism? If the standards be expositions, I may hold to them just in as far as my judgment directs; but that is to deny their authority, and to place them beside Henry, and Scott, and Doddridge, as friends to be consulted, not as absolute masters to be implicitly obeyed.

3. *Are they symbolical, that is, are they abstracts of divine truth?*

Abstracts may be useful, but when made by imperfect men must necessarily be imperfect. Is the bible inconveniently large, or difficult of reference? If not, whence the necessity for abstracts regarded practically as of equal authority with the bible itself? In your church courts reference is made almost exclusively to the standards—a direct appeal to the Scripture is deemed unconstitutional. Whence the ground for this deference to an abstract, and whence the security that those who prepared it gave every truth its place, and its due share of importance? Whence the consistency of conducting the most solemn ecclesiastical trials upon the understood principle of forbidding an appeal from human formularies, to the truth of God as dictated by his Spirit, and which is more clear, more simple, and as accessible as any human composition can be? I can appreciate the standards as abstracts of divine truth, and find them as such useful; but I cannot give to them the place or authority of revelation, which would be tantamount to acknowledging them as infallible.

4. *Are they tests of orthodoxy?*

They can only be so in as far as subscription implies belief in the principles they contain, and in so far as these principles themselves are in accordance with divine truth.

But does subscription imply belief? Then, why not subscribe to the last page of revelation? Is it that the language of Scripture is more equivocal and less intelligible? That will not be pleaded. What rational grounds, then, for subscription to articles of belief in the mass, as in the "Confession of Faith?" A man of principle can only subscribe the Confession in the sense in which he understands it, and that from various causes may be in very important particulars widely different from what was intended by the compilers. An unprincipled man will subscribe even with the knowledge that he does not understand the words of the formula in the sense of the compilers, or that he does understand them, but virtually rejects them. What might thus have been anticipated in theory, has been established in practice. The worst of errors have sprung up in those bodies requiring subscription to standards. This will not be denied. If the propositions contained in the "Confession of Faith" were put to the candidate for subscription one by one, and a *bona fide* assent required to each, there might be deemed some plausible use in subscription, but this is impracticable. There being no security, then, for soundness of sentiment, from the fact of subscription to human tests of orthodoxy, more than to the bible itself, it is preposterous to uphold what is demonstrably so absurd in itself, and which has proved so futile in practice.

5. *Are they designed to secure uniformity and purity of doctrine?*

Then uniformity and purity should be found where standards are upheld; but is it so? In the Church of England every form of heresy is rife, and not more than a third of its ministers teach the doctrines to which they subscribe in the thirty-nine articles. The subscribers to a Protestant creed are the bold, zealous, and untiring advocates of Popish doctrines and forms. In the Church of Scotland the distinction of *moderate* and *evangelical*, is not one which refers to church politics merely, but to the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. In the other churches which hold by human standards, there are differences respecting the most important truths of christianity, notwithstanding strong affirmations to the contrary. How can human standards, even supposing them to be perfect, promote purity? Can they be supposed better fitted to do so than the oracles of the living God? Does not the assertion of their necessity for that purpose imply a defect

in divine revelation? But, supposing the standards to be pure, what necessary connexion is there between purity of doctrine in a book, and purity of doctrine in a religious body? It may be true that a body holding to the doctrine in their standards may be pure; but does the purity of the book imply the purity of body? If it does, why is not every denomination that assumes the name of christian pure, when they profess to take the BIBLE for their standard? If the purity of divine truth does not secure the certain purity of those who profess to adhere to it, what superior excellence attaches to human standards, or to divine truth thrown into the form directed by human wisdom to secure that purity? It is a monstrous delusion to assert that the purity of a church is to be judged of by the purity of its standards. Truth in the book is not necessarily truth in the heart, nor are the rules of holy living in the book to be identified with holiness of practice in the life. The knowledge of divine truth is progressive, and it would be extremely absurd to bind the minds either of teachers or taught, to a rigid adherence to the views of truth held by those who lived ages back. In as far as they attained to the knowledge of the truth, there is little danger of deviation from their views; but why should the mind be trammelled in its researches? Are we to rest at the point of attainment marked in the fallible productions of men? Why shackle the understandings of all succeeding generations by demanding implicit reliance upon that which must necessarily be admitted to be imperfect? Again and again have church standards been altered; always, however, in opposition to their tendency, which is to prevent change for the better as well as for the worse. Divest the standards of their authority, that is, let them be a code of opinions not binding, and deviation from which involves no anathemas, and I have no objections to them. Do we then make void all authority in respect to religious principle, and allow every man with impunity to believe and propagate whatever seems good in his own eyes? Certainly not. Heresy is to be detected by an appeal to the only perfect standard. By the dictates of inspiration alone may we condemn or approve, not daring to substitute any other standard which has not the stamp of heaven.

6. *Are the standards subordinate?*

Then I ask, In what sense? It is vain to give them such a designation while the practical use made of them

would indicate that they are supreme. Is it meant that they are less perfect than the divine word? Then why adopt them, when that word itself is of as easy reference, and its statements respecting every essential doctrine as plain and explicit as can be conceived? Is it that they are of inferior authority? Then why designate them standards? and why in all cases of trial in ecclesiastical courts are they appealed to, to the exclusion, except by a half-extorted courtesy, to the word of God? Why are the most momentous questions affecting the character and spiritual interests of parties implicated in charges of heresy settled by a reference to them exclusively? Where standards are acknowledged, it is absurd to say that the word of God is the *only* rule of faith, unless it be pleaded that the standards are the word of God. Where is, then, the subordination? What can be conceived of as better fitted to exhibit the standards as of supreme authority than that they should be referred to in all disputed points of doctrine and discipline, and that in no case can there be an appeal from their statements to those of the word of God? One would suppose from the use made of the formula, that they were an improved edition of the statute-book of heaven, and instead of being subordinate, that they were in all senses superior to the bible. There is, indeed, one sense in which their inferiority may be indicated, and that is, that they are not made the text-book in public teaching. In some instances, they are even made to occupy this position, and in all cases, though not directly the text-book, they furnish the doctrines to be taught, for every one who subscribes the standards is bound solemnly not to teach any thing contrary to them. They are thus *the tests to which divine truth is to be brought*, and should the preacher in his prayerful study of the scriptures arrive at conclusions contrary to the articles of subscription, he is bound to suppress them, however important in his view, or to choose the alternative of seceding from a body whose principles he cannot maintain.

Possibly there may be some other grounds for the defence of church standards which I have not specified. If there be, I am not acquainted with them. I have looked at them with an honest desire to defend them if defensible; but the more I have examined their claims the more thoroughly convinced have I felt that they are baseless. You may deem my language strong and irreverent; but it is the language of unhesitating conviction, not only that they utterly fail to secure the benefits they are pro-

fessedly intended to secure, but that they are positively injurious. They diminish the reverence due to the word of God—they render public teaching formal, technical, and obscure,—they restrain scriptural research,—they fetter the intellect,—and they promote delusion. I once, like you, thought that where they were discarded, error and impurity must widely prevail. My theory is overturned by indisputable facts. Than the body with which I have seen it my duty to unite, there cannot be any more harmonious in doctrine, or more uniform in practice. All that is really valuable in human compositions is available, while the obnoxious element of authority is excluded. The ablest theologians of which Britain can boast, were men who despised the exclusiveness of formularies, and pursued an independent course of research, taking the guidance of preceding labourers where it approved itself, but not slavishly bound by human opinions, as having the authority of law, or inspiration itself. Though I reject church standards as such, I do not depreciate the excellencies of the doctrines they contain, nor would I hesitate to subscribe to most of them, as containing a fair statement of my religious principles, but not conceding to them the authority and weight which their advocates claim, nor sanctioning implicit confidence in them, as they are but the productions of men. I may fail to convince you of the truth of the views which I have expressed. I have merely given you a brief and imperfect statement of the reasons that have led me to alter my views respecting church standards. However unsatisfactory they may appear to your judgment, they may perhaps diminish the surprise excited by my venturing to unite with a body which acknowledges as their standard the Bible and the Bible alone.

Here I might conclude my letter, but I think I am warranted, after assigning my reasons for rejecting church standards, to ask you to consider seriously the validity of those reasons. If the Bible alone should be the test and standard of doctrine and duty to individual believers, or to a church, then authoritative standards, whether ancient or modern, are inexpedient and unnecessary. But this is not all: they are positively wrong; they are to be abandoned. Submission to them trenches upon the authority of Christ. To come under solemn obligation to hear and hold by them, is to become disciples of men; to acknowledge other masters than Christ, and to make void the law of God by human tradition. The faith of the adherents to such standards, so far as that faith bows to

the authority they claim, stands in the wisdom of men, not in the power of God.

The question, be it remembered, is not at all respecting the *orthodoxy* of any particular standard. I have already stated an objection founded on the acknowledged imperfection of all such compositions; but should a confession of faith and formulary of worship be compiled perfectly faultless to the best of my judgment, I would as sternly refuse to subscribe my name to the document as if it were filled with the grossest error. I object to the *principles* altogether. I cannot bring myself into bondage to any man's system of opinions, even though, according to my present degree of light, they may be true and sound. I cannot bind myself to make no advance in knowledge, and no improvement or extension of the views I entertain of divine truth as unfolded in the scriptures. Along with such an obligation, I should at the same time bind myself to give up reading the bible; or, which is the same thing, vow never to admit a ray of light from that divine source more than I have already received.

Some people think and say that if standards after all do little good, they do as little harm; that they are useful and very helpful, as giving a systematic view of truth, and so on. I freely admit that they may be useful as *books*, while at the same time I maintain that they are hurtful and ought to be renounced as *standards*; and it is in this character we have to do with them. I may have no quarrel with the Confession of Faith, as to doctrine, and when I was a Presbyterian I saw nothing wrong in the chapters upon discipline, church government, the power of civil magistrate in ecclesiastical matters, and so on; but with my present views of *standards*, I would withhold my subscription on the ground that, by appending it, I should be guilty of admitting human authority in matters of religion—robbing Christ of his glory, and the Bible of its honour; thus virtually renouncing my best hopes, and trampling on my strongest convictions.

You have expressed surprise that I should venture to unite with a body of christians bound together by no standard of truth but the Bible. Allow me to express my surprise that you can continue in communion with a church which acknowledges any other authoritative rule.

I am, yours, &c.,

Greenock.

ON PREPARATION

FOR

The Lord's Supper.

In a Letter from a Minister to one of his stated Hearers.

FRIEND,—I have been so impressed about the circumstances in which I saw you last Lord's day, that I cannot refrain from telling you what I think and feel relative to your conduct. May the Holy Spirit of all grace guide my heart and pen, and so engage your attention, and impress your heart in reading, that our labour in writing and reading may not be in vain.

Think not that I am about to accuse you of any of those crimes which are punishable by the law of men. In this respect, you may be as blameless as Paul was before his conversion. Neither suppose that I am about to rank you with those who scoff at our holy profession, for you attend all stated seasons of worship, and last Lord's day you appeared much impressed at the time of dispensing the Lord's Supper. But I was grieved on that occasion by observing that you ranked not with the flock of Christ, but with the promiscuous multitude—an observer indeed, but not a partaker of this feast of love—a hearer, but not a doer of this part of the will of Christ. How you felt on the occasion, and whether you reckon your conduct sinful or justifiable, I know not. God knoweth. But I shall, in love to your soul, now set before you the loss and the danger attending your present conduct.

1. Want of a connection with a church, prevents you from performing many important christian duties. You cannot do God's house-work but in his house. You cannot perform the duties of fellowship while out of church-fellowship.

2. Your present conduct is an open violation of all those laws which command the observance of Divine ordinances.

3. When you see the Lord's table covered, and all things ready, and remember that you also are invited to come to the feast; your refusing to come, bears an appearance of "making light of it."

4. By neglecting christian ordinances, you lose all the present advantage, and future rewards, which a right performance of them would afford.

5. You deprive yourself of the blessed enjoyment of God in his ordinances.

6. You exclude yourself from the love, and care, and sympathy, and support of brethren.

7. You deprive yourself of the use of various means of sanctification, and who can tell how far it may be owing to this cause that some secret besetting sins continue to have dominion over you.

8. You lose the advantage and comfort of evidence of an interest in Christ, arising from doing his commandments.

9. You lose the rejoicing proceeding from the testimony of a good conscience, that you are walking so as to please God.

10. You lose the benefit of the obligation arising from making a profession, to walk so as to support that profession.

11. In standing aloof from the Church of Christ, you withhold from it all the advantage which the right performance of social duties would afford.

12. By ranking with the promiscuous multitude, you strengthen their hands, in making light of the feast of love, and in working out their own ruin.

13. By walking contrary to the will of God, you forfeit all claim on his promised blessing, and expose yourself to the punishment of neglected duty, and unoccupied talent, in the day of judgment.

What an alarming estimate of loss and of danger have you now read! Will you then lay down this paper for a little, and pause, and pray, and allow this weight of evidence to come home to your heart, so as to work convic-

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tion and repentance. I have set these particulars in numerical order before you, that you may see and feel your danger; and what adds incalculably to this estimate, is the danger of losing your soul also by neglecting the appointed means of salvation.

Perhaps you now begin to feel pressed and disposed to fly for refuge: and I know whither you would fly. You wish to make a refuge of your alleged unfitness for christian duties. Are you not, at this moment, and while you thus read, disposed to say in your heart, How can I go to the Lord's table, while so unfit for that ordinance? Now, I readily allow, that your neglecting this ordinance, is evidence of your unfitness for observing it; for if your heart were right with God, you would not disregard his revealed will. It is owing to something wrong in the heart, that every professing christian does not attend to the Lord's Supper just as scripturally, and frequently as Christ has commanded.

But why are you unfit for observing the Lord's Supper? Perhaps you say, because I am a great sinner. But why do you continue in this condition? Have you not heard of a Saviour? and has not this Saviour offered you pardon, and peace, and acceptance, and preparation for all the duties of time, and for all the glories of heaven? Has he not been saying to you, Wilt thou be made whole? Wilt thou be made clean? Has he not made all things ready for the feast, and given you a cordial invitation to come and be prepared for it, as well as to enjoy it? Your unfitness for this ordinance, is therefore a very great sin and a very great shame.

Is your unfitness then a proper excuse for neglecting this ordinance? Most certainly not. It is the duty of all men, at all times, and in all places, to observe all things whatsoever Christ hath commanded; and it is their duty to do so in faith, and with a willing mind. I allow, that whatsoever is not of faith, is sin: and he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself. But whatever may be your present condition,

it is your duty to repent and believe the Gospel without a moment's delay, and proceed henceforth in faith to observe all things that Christ hath commanded.

* But perhaps I have mistaken your case. You probably conceive that you have repented, and are willing to attend to christian ordinances; but that you are not yet determined with whom you shall unite in religious fellowship. If so, you tread on difficult ground, you walk on slippery places, and stand much in need of being put on your guard against the numerous snares to which you are exposed. The maxims of the world—the influence of carnal relatives—worldly interest—the fear of man—dread of the cross—love of the praise of men—and the desire after the gratification of fleshly propensities, all stand in the way of scripture obedience: and every thing wrong in the imagination of your own heart, will lead you to make a wrong choice as to your religious connections. I would wish you therefore, first of all, to solve the important question, Whether in the choice of the church you may join, you wish to please yourself or God? If you are minded to please yourself, it matters little with whom you unite; for fellowship formed from such a motive, is altogether foreign to acceptable obedience: If, on the other hand, you feel the importance of being determined by what will please God, you will readily perceive that nothing will answer that purpose but what is purely scriptural: And in proportion as the saving love of the truth disposes you to follow the Bible only, so will your soul loathe and abandon the spurious inventions of men. Now I feel confident, that after reading those numerous passages of scripture, which express the Divine displeasure against impurity of communion, and which command the Lord's people to separate from the ungodly, and from those who have only a form of godliness, but deny its power; you will not be able to unite with any church of mixed character, with a hope of pleasing God. Nor will your conscience allow you to unite with any church whose order and government tend to bring you

into subjection to the will of men—to prevent you from obeying some of the laws of Christ, (particularly that law, Mat. xviii. 15-17), or to deprive you of means and liberty to serve him in all things, with an enlightened and willing mind.

Observe, my friend, that God will not accept the observance of the Lord's Supper, unless it is done scripturally. When the Corinthians departed from the scripture rule in attending to it, Paul said, "This is not to eat the Lord's Supper." Unless it is observed in communion with proper characters, and according to the Divine rule, and for the ends of Divine appointment, it will neither please God, nor profit your soul.

Do not deceive yourself, as some have done, by supposing that if your own heart is right in the service, form, and manner, and connections are of small importance. A right condition of heart will follow the right ways of the Lord; and without regard to the Divine will, the most specious appearance of seriousness and devotion, is only an abomination in the sight of God.

But you are probably settled in your mind as to the principles of scripture order, only you think you need time to prepare for eating the Lord's Supper. If this is your case, I fear you are mistaken as to the nature of preparation, and I conceive that mistake consists in making this preparation your own work, rather than the work of the Lord. If you think of preparing yourself, you indeed need much time,—much more time than you will be allowed to have in the world,—and all this time and labor with all you can expend on other physicians, will leave you nothing better but worse: but if you employ Christ to prepare you, he will do it speedily. All things that Christ hath provided for preparing you for the feast, are ready, and on demand, for all who will seek and receive them freely. What then can you gain by taking time for preparation? Will Christ be less willing to bestow preparatory blessings this day, than next month, or next

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and receive them when you have grown older and more hardened in sin than at this present moment? Will Satan be more willing to part with you after you have served him a while longer, than when you first thought of turning from him to the living God? And besides, it is by practice that all the Lord's people are prepared for doing his will. What would you think of preparing to labour in the ground, without putting the hand to the plough? What would you think of a few days or weeks' preparation for suckling, before bringing the child to its mother's breast? Alas, my friend, I fear that your plan of preparation, would end in starvation and death. It was not after this manner, that the primitive disciples were prepared to eat the Lord's Supper. *On the same day*, they heard the Gospel, and "were pricked in their hearts," and "gladly received the word," and were "added to the church" for continuing "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and of prayers." Nor is there an example in the whole of the New Testament of one acknowledged to be a believer, living out of connection with a christian church, and in the neglect of christian ordinances.

Are you, like some, afraid of making a public profession, lest you should dishonour Christ by sinning after it? This is a most singular caution, for one to be afraid of doing what is right, lest he should afterwards do what is wrong. But why are you not afraid of dishonouring Christ by making no profession, or by sinning before you make a profession? Why are you not afraid that sin, in either case, will wrong your own soul? And why are you not stirred up by your fears to do what is necessary to keep you from falling? If you are afraid of falling in God's ways, what security have you against falling in your own ways? And what reason have you to think that standing in your own ways will afford you good standing in the day of judgment? Considering you are in danger of falling in either way, whether it is better to fall in circumstances where no man will care for you

soul, or among brethren who will labour to restore you "in the spirit of meekness?" Indeed, I cannot wonder that you are afraid of falling while you stand out of the way of God's protection. While unconnected with a church, you are standing without the vineyard, and all the day idle, as it regards the work which God requires you to do in the vineyard. You are standing on the enemies' ground, exposed to their snares and assaults, and excluded from the watchful care of brethren, and the strengthening influence of Divine ordinances. Properly speaking, this is a fallen condition, from which you need to be raised.

Some have pleaded for delaying the observance of the Lord's Supper, till they got removed from some ungodly family, or neighbourhood, or companions, from whom they are exposed to strong temptation. Have you ever reasoned in this way? It is like refusing to take medicine till you are recovered from disease. It is like refusing to put on armour till you have escaped from the enemy. If you are exposed to temptation, you stand in greater need of the appointed means of preservation. Were you properly concerned about the condition of your ungodly associates, you would rather resolve speedily to exhibit before them a full and consistent christian profession, with a view to awaken and win them to Christ. Were you truly alive to the honour of Christ, you would lose no time to confess him, and glorify him before those in whose presence you have formerly dishonoured him. Beware lest you be ashamed to confess Christ before them: for he hath said, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven," Mat. x. 32.

But you are probably hindered by some near and dear relatives, or companions, who though they make a profession of religion, are avowed enemies to that kind of communion which your conscience approves as being

scriptural. I know ~~that~~ ^{that} is more likely to stumble the weak and unwary: and I know of nothing that is better calculated to deliver from it, than the effectual working of that impressive saying of Christ, "He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

But you will say, "I have been thinking of waiting on some of my friends, with the hope of bringing them along with me." And what if they should keep you waiting till death come, and find you never having once shewn forth Christ's death at his table? What would have become of Lot had he waited in Sodom till his wife was brought out of it? You know not whether any of your friends will ever be disposed to go along with you. It is more likely that they may succeed in bringing you along with them to a worldly communion, than that you should bring them along with you to a scriptural communion. If you would bring your friends forward, you should go before them and show them a good example, and give them proof of the sincerity of your profession. So long as you act otherwise, you will give them occasion to think lightly both of the ordinance which you neglect to observe, and of yourself in recommending to others what you will not touch with one of your fingers.

Some outer-court worshippers excuse themselves in not uniting with scriptural churches, alleging that bad characters are found among them as well as among other churches. If you are so impressed, I beg your attention to the following considerations:—

1. Taking into account the very strong popular prejudice against these churches, and the consequent disposition to "speak evil against them falsely," you should be very cautious in taking up an evil report against them.

2. If you have heard of bad characters being found in these churches, you have also heard of such being

put away. It is not the occurrence but the wilful retention of open sin that constitutes the corruption of other churches.

3. Though it may be true that some who have sinned have been retained; it may be true that they have repented, and that all has been done for purging the church from the effects of their sin, and for restoring them to fellowship, which the laws of Christ require.

4. You may err in expecting more purity in this imperfect state, than the scripture account of human nature will warrant. It is not lawful to put away a man for every fault. The scriptures speak of the "weak," whose infirmities must be borne with much long-suffering—"uncomely parts," whose rash, imprudent, uncourteous behaviour gives cause of grief to the brethren, and offence to the world—of disciples walking disorderly, who are not to be counted enemies but admonished as brethren,—and of occasional swelling and tumults arising from remaining corruption which must be subdued by the influence of truth. But such defections of christian character, differ very widely from the total want of christianity which is so manifest in the ignorance and gross immorality which mark the character of the majority of worldly churches.

5. It is possible that you may be privy to some fault which is not known to the brethren, and for which they are therefore not accountable. But perhaps you are not aware that in that case the sin lieth at your door, for it is just owing to your not being a member of the church, standing in your place and doing your duty towards the offender as commanded in Mat. xviii. 15-17, that such offence is not removed.

I know not whether you are of the number who are stumbled at weekly communion; but I know that you are exposed to the influence of some who are clamorous against it. And what are the characters who oppose it? We never heard of disciples, either of primitive or modern times, who attended to weekly communion, complaining of its frequency. Those who thus complain, are

persons who attend to that ordinance very seldom, and, in other respects, not according to the rule of scripture. Now I protest against their judgment on the following grounds:—

1. Having had no experience of weekly communion, they are not competent judges whether it be attended with good or evil.

2. It is necessary for such to reason against its frequency, in order to justify themselves in attending to it so seldom.

3. It is owing to want of proper enjoyment of the ordinance, that such object to its frequency. I hold it as a general maxim, that the human mind desires frequent use of what affords enjoyment. When the Gentiles enjoyed the doctrine which Paul preached, they "besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath." And I am sure, that all who enjoy the Lord's Supper, will desire to have it dispensed to them next sabbath. From my own past experience, as well as from the testimony of others, and what may be inferred as a consequence of departure from scripture rule; I am persuaded that, generally speaking, the *Sacrament Sabbath*, as it is called, is not a day of rest and gladness, but of bondage and heaviness. How can it be otherwise? The great mass of the communicants, on such occasions, are characters to whom the sabbath itself is a weariness, and who regard these extra services as a restraint on their wonted carnal pleasures: and those among them who have obtained a Bible instruction, are likely either to be smitten by the remonstrances of their own conscience against their unscriptural conduct, or so hardened by obstinate neglect of known duty, as to be incapable of being rightly exercised, either about the evil of sin, or the joys of God's salvation.

I have my fears too, that many reason against frequent communion, in order to provide for frequent indulgence of sin. I cannot conceive how any can urge the impracticability of preparation for weekly communion without meditating the appropriation of some interim season of laxity for the purposes of fleshly gratification. No one who admits the obligation to be daily prepared for death, can argue against the practicality of weekly preparation for the Lord's Supper. And those who are otherwise minded, would likely be very content with having the Lord's day, and every thing connected with the

Lord's word, and ways, as seldom intruding upon them as the Lord's Supper.

But you may have some *secret* reasons for halting, which you are not willing to avow. Are you afraid of the cross? If you cannot bear the cross, you cannot be a disciple. If you cannot bear the cross, you will remain under the curse. Do you love the praise of men? You may obtain it by following the ways which please men, but this gain will cost you the loss of the praise of God. Are you stumbled at the poverty and smallness of the number of some of the churches, as if you could readily unite with such as the thousands at Jerusalem, while you cannot find it in your heart to take up with such as the twelve at Ephesus? This would shew that your mind is in quest of something else than the obedience and enjoyment of truth; for Divine truth, and the presence and enjoyment of the God of truth, are the same among two or three, as among thousands.

Does your halting proceed from some secret sin hardening your heart—separating between you and God—preventing your access with confidence to him in his ordinances? This is an alarming case. "Be sure your sin will find you out." He that covereth his sin shall not prosper, but whose confesseth and forsaketh findeth mercy." If you cannot get your sin destroyed, it will destroy you. Repent and bring your sin to the cross that it may be crucified: and have recourse speedily to that frequent review of the cross, in this ordinance which God has appointed as a means for preventing your sin from having dominion over you.

Having thus adverted to some of the probable causes of detention, I shall now bring to view what is necessary for overcoming them, and for inclining your heart to keep this feast of love. Christ says, "If ye love me keep my commandments." He wants you to love him, because love will overcome all your difficulties and prejudices, and render your obedience easy, and profitable to yourself, and pleasing in his sight. And surely poor lost sinners have good reason to love him who loved them, and gave himself for them. He had compassion on them when there was none to pity. He provided for the payment of their debt when they had nothing to pay. He accomplished for them, a full and free salvation when they were lost and helpless. And he accomplished all this by his death in their stead, as a fruit of his eternal love

to their souls; O my friend, this is most melting, and winning, and constraining. It is by believing this, (that the burdened sinner is delivered from fear and bondage, and inspired with hope, and confidence, and joy before God. It is this that makes willing to bear the yoke of Christ, and to bear his cross—to follow him wholly, and to count it good to draw near to him at his table.—If you believe in Christ, you may well remember him at his table, who remembered you on the cross. You may well remember him weekly in this ordinance, who remembers you daily before his Father, and watches over you every moment. You have good cause to shew forth his death, for it is the life of your soul, and to remember his love which has procured for you all the good you possess, and all you have in prospect, and to love him who first loved you.

While you read this, you may probably pause and say, "Well, this is just what is wanting. Had I enough of love to Christ, I would cheerfully go to his table; but while I feel so cold and lifeless, I dare not venture." But your not having gone sooner to the Lord's table, is perhaps the main cause of your want of love. Your love must wax cold, if you neglect what is necessary to exercise it. Your natural appetite, would be in as bad condition as your love, if you were as backward in the use of what is needful for the body. What if the neglect of this duty be the very thing that has hardened your heart so that you cannot love the Saviour? You cannot love one whom you have injured, till you repent and act dutifully towards him. You are now acting injuriously towards Christ, and will never love him but in doing his will. You have long halted between two opinions. If you would find rest to your soul, and serve your generation, and honour the Saviour, hear his voice, and do his will, and do it quickly. For behold he cometh quickly, and will render to every one according to his works.

I am yours, sincerely and faithfully,

* * * * *

THE LORD'S SUPPER;

ITS NATURE AND DESIGN.

THE account given by the sacred writers of the institution of the Lord's Supper is to the following effect: "The Lord Jesus, the night in which he was betrayed, as he and his apostles were eating the Passever, took bread, and blessed, or gave thanks, and gave it to the disciples, saying—Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: This do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup; and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying—Drink ye all of it; for this cup is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you—for the remission of the sins of many: This do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

The symbols which the heavenly Saviour thus directs his people to employ, in commemorating his dying love, are bread and wine; the bread designed to represent his body, and the other his blood. The bread was broken, to indicate that he was to be "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities;" and the wine was poured out, to shew that his blood was to be shed for the redemption of ruined man. His disciples, in breaking the bread and drinking the wine, were taught to view their sins as the procuring cause of the Redeemer's sufferings, and to contemplate his atoning death as the sole ground of acceptance with God, and as the only source of peace, and comfort, and joy. It is of no little importance clearly to understand the import of these simple but significant emblems—to apprehend distinctly the great truths which,

when sitting at the table of the Lord, they are intended to impress upon our minds. Many, it is to be feared, even of the genuine followers of Christ, approach the Lord's table with very inadequate and unscriptural views of the nature of the ordinance. It needs not therefore excite our surprise that they fail in obtaining that comfort and spiritual improvement which the proper observance of the sacred supper is designed and fitted to impart. They approach this blessed well of salvation with an eager desire to obtain large draughts of its soul-satisfying waters, and they return from it again and again in the bitterness of disappointment.

Not a few, for instance, appear to imagine that a change takes place upon the bread and wine when the Lord's Supper is observed, and that it is in consequence of this change that believers derive benefit from the ordinance. This notion has had the effect of surrounding the institution with an air of deep and awful mystery. It is the origin of the Popish dogma of transubstantiation. The Roman Catholics, as every one knows, imagine that the bread and wine that are employed at the celebration of the Eucharist are really turned into the body and blood of the Lord—an idea so absurd, so entirely opposed to Scripture, to reason, and to common sense, that one cannot help expressing astonishment, that it should have obtained so long and so extensively among mankind.

The practice of consecrating the bread and wine that are used at the Lord's table—of “setting them apart from a common to a holy use”—is fitted to convey a very erroneous idea of the nature of the ordinance. This practice is derived from an expression that occurs in the account which is given in the New Testament of the institution of the Supper. The Evangelist Matthew informs us, that, “as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it.” Mat. xxvi. 26. It has been inferred from this, that the bread is to be consecrated. But the reader, on consulting the passage, will observe, that the pronoun

It is in italics, which indicates that there is no corresponding term in the original language. All that Matthew avers, therefore, is, that Jesus took bread and *blessed*. By the word "blessed" is meant merely the giving of thanks. This is rendered apparent by the following verse, where it is said, that "he took the cup and gave thanks." Our Saviour did not bless the bread and the wine—he did not consecrate them—he did not set them apart from a common to a sacred use; he simply presented thanksgiving to the Lord. That this is the legitimate meaning of the word, is evident also, from the account which Paul gives of the ordinance in the eleventh chapter of 1st Corinthians, v. 23-28. If those who cast their eye over these pages, will take the trouble to consult the passage by turning to it in their Bibles, they will not fail to be satisfied that the term "bless" means simply the giving of thanks. The truth is, there is not one word said in the New Testament about blessing the elements: the blessing of the elements, therefore, is an addition that has been made by man—it is a something that men have superadded to the simple institution. The bread and wine that are used at the dispensation of the Lord's Supper are the very same as the bread and wine that are left. There is no consecration in the matter.

The ordinance of the Supper is a *commemorative* rite; and the bread and wine are merely the memorials of the Saviour's dying love. There is nothing in these symbols themselves that is possessed of the least efficacy. They are merely helps to our faith, they assist our spiritual vision, they aid us in calling to remembrance the wonders of redeeming mercy—the closing scenes of the Saviour's history—his excruciating agonies—his atoning death. "Do this in remembrance of me," is the dying command of Jesus to all his followers. "Take your places around my Table—take into your hands the memorials of my dying love—think of all that I have done and suffered for your redemption—of the wounds and bruises to which I

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was subjected for your sakes—think of my untold agonies in the Garden and on the Cross—all which were endured that you might be delivered from sin, and hell, and wrath, and introduced to the enjoyment of eternal blessedness in the sanctuary above.' The bread and wine that are employed in the celebration of the sacred Supper are thus to be received as the memorials of redeeming love, and nothing more.

The Lord's Supper being simply a commemorative institution, it is very improperly designated a *Sacrament*, as the term is calculated to convey rather an erroneous idea of its nature. This word is improper on various accounts. In the first place, it is not *scriptural*; it is not to be found in the Bible. The only forms of expression that are employed in the New Testament to designate this ordinance are,—“the Lord's Supper,”—“the breaking of bread.” 1 Cor. xi. 20. Acts ii. 42; and xx. 7. It is of very great importance to adhere as closely as possible to Scripture phraseology in the names that are given to the institutions of Christianity. Much injury has arisen from the neglect of this; and not a few of the mistaken notions that obtain on religious subjects are to be traced to the use of unscriptural terms. Words, it is true, are but names; but then, it is to be recollected, that very erroneous ideas are frequently attached to words; and hence arises the danger. But there is a stronger objection than even this to the use of the term *Sacrament* as a designation of this ordinance. The word literally signifies an oath; being the name that was given to the oath that was administered to the ancient Roman soldiery on entering the army of the Commonwealth. Now, there is nothing that bears the most distant analogy to this in the Lord's Supper. No oath is administered, no oath is taken. There is something, indeed, that has resemblance to an oath in the ideas that are frequently attached to the ordinance. It is no uncommon thing to hear people speak about the *vows* that are made at the Lord's table.

Now, the practice of vowing in connection with this ordinance, has its origin in the term Sacrament. Many who cast their eye over these pages will be ready to ask, Are vows at the table of the Lord to be viewed as improper? The question is answered by proposing another. Is the practice of vowing at the Lord's table *scriptural*? Is it countenanced by the New Testament? Is there one word said about it in the accounts that are given there of the institution of the Supper? If so, where? Let the reader search and examine for himself. He will not find the shadow of an allusion to any thing of the kind. But it may be asked, Do you regard all holy resolutions to serve the Lord as unlawful and improper? By no means. But why connect these with the Lord's Supper, and confine them to this ordinance? It is this that we deem improper and unscriptural; it is this that is fitted to give an erroneous idea of the nature of the ordinance, to hold it forth to view, as if it were something more than a *commemorative* rite. It is of unspeakable moment distinctly to understand that a believer does not enter on an engagement to be the Lord's at his table; that engagement was made before he approached the table. The engagement is made at conversion. When the sinner is awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger, and turns his eye to the Cross of Christ as the source of pardon, and peace, and joy, he devotes himself to the service of the heavenly Saviour, and determines, through the strength of divine grace, to live to his glory in the world. It is then he solemnly resolves to live, not to himself, but to him who loved him, and gave himself for his salvation. When he appears at the Lord's table he appears as a professed servant of Jesus, and earnestly prays that he may be strengthened to continue in the ways of righteousness. He makes no vow; but meditates on the dying love of his Lord, that he may learn to hate sin with more perfect hatred, and devote the remainder of his days to the glory of him who hath called him out of darkness into his marvellous light.

It is obvious, then, that the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, when divested of the trappings which men have thrown around it, is an institution that is distinguished for its admirable simplicity. But beautifully simple as is the institution itself, the objects which it is intended to serve are of the noblest and most important nature. It bears a striking analogy in this respect to all the other arrangements connected with the Christian economy. In these the most sublime and magnificent ends are accomplished by the simplest means. What can be simpler, for example, than the way which God has appointed for sinners to obtain salvation through Christ? It is neither more nor less than the belief of his own testimony concerning his Son. "Believe and live," is "Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan." How grand, how magnificent the object—the salvation of unnumbered myriads of the ruined and apostate family of man! How unutterably simple the means—the belief of the truth concerning Jesus! In the Lord's Supper we discover the same beautiful simplicity blended with the same magnificence of design.

1. The ordinance of the Supper is intended to serve as a *memorial of Christ's dying love*. The sacred command, in obedience to which believers approach the table of their Lord, implies that their hearts are apt to be occupied with other objects, and to forget him who loved them and died for their salvation. This may appear very improbable; but it is too true. Can it be that those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious—who have rested their hopes for eternity on his finished work—who derive all their peace, and hope, and joy, from his precious blood;—can it be that ~~they~~ they should forget their redeeming God? Strange it must appear to angels: to the young disciple, who is experiencing all the glow and fervour of his first love, it will appear impossible; but all who have spent any length of time in the divine life have felt it to be true. They lament it—they mourn over it; but they

feel a constant proneness to forget their Lord. Depravity, though subdued, is not eradicated,—the world, with its cares, and temptations, and enchantments, often draws their eye from the Cross,—and Satan employs all his wiles to lead them from the Saviour. Jesus knew all this, and he provided for it. “Do this,” said he, “in remembrance of me :” “Take into your hands the memorials of my dying love—call to remembrance my sufferings and death—think of Gethsemane and of Calvary—and let my matchless love be constantly present to your minds.”

“He knows what wand’ring hearts we have,
Apt to forget his lovely face;
And to refresh our minds he gave
Those kind memorials of his grace.”

Believers when celebrating this sacred ordinance, approach, as it were, within sight of the Cross ; by the eye of faith they obtain a glimpse of the suffering Saviour ; the symbols of his broken body and shed blood bring vividly to their recollection what he endured for their sake. These are times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord : Jesus makes himself known to them in the breaking of bread ; his blessed Spirit takes of the things that are his, and shows them to their souls ; and hallowed is the communion which they are privileged to hold with their Divine Lord. Then they feel that they are not their own—they feel that Christ has loved them with an everlasting love—they feel that they are his for ever.—This, then, is one glorious design of the institution of the sacred Supper, to keep the followers of Jesus in remembrance of his love in doing for their salvation.

2. The Lord’s Supper is intended also to serve, as a means of spiritual growth to believers. The work of sanctification is carried on in their souls through the instrumentality of the truth ; but, in order that the truth may sanctify, it must be exhibited to the mind. In the ordinance of the Supper it is presented through the medium

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of the symbols that are employed ; and what is so well fitted to promote the life of godliness in the soul as the truths that are vividly brought before the mind at the table of the Lord ? The lesson of holiness is best learned at the foot of the Cross ; it is there that we are taught to contemplate sin as the cause of the Redeemer's woes ; it is there that we learn the paramount importance of holiness, and feel the power of the love of Christ sweetly constraining us to live, not to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again. Believers in every age have associated the Lord's Supper as a most precious means of advancement in the Christian life. When sitting at the Lord's table, they have beheld sin to be indeed exceedingly sinful ; they have seen the emptiness of the world ; and their hearts have been impressed with the paramount importance of a holy life.

3. The Lord's Supper is designed also as a *manifestation of the union that subsists among the followers of the Lamb*. It is to the exhibition of this blessed union that Paul refers when he says,—“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body ; for we are all partakers of that one bread.” Believers who are united together in the fellowship of the gospel are here represented as the body of Christ. This beautiful image indicates the close and endearing relationship that subsists among them. Christ himself is their head—from him they derive all their strength and all their nourishment ; and without him they can do nothing ; and they are joined together by the closest ties. Love is the life-blood that circulates through the system ; it flows through every vein, and gives strength to every member.

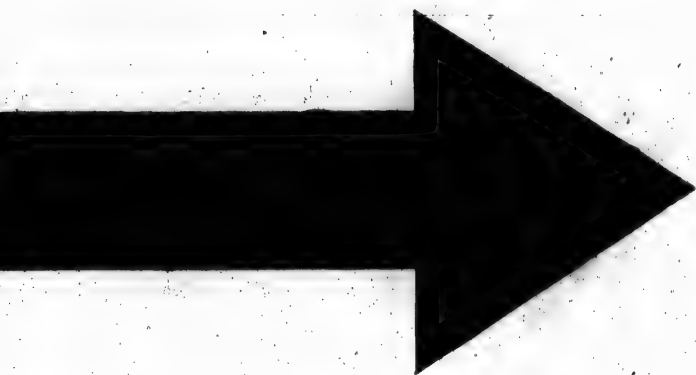
This oneness of soul is never so powerfully felt by the followers of Christ as when they sit down together at the table of their common Lord, and with the memorials of

his love in their hands, meet the wonders of redeeming mercy. They feel that they are one in him; and this union the sacred Supper is designed to shew to the world. When they sit down together at Christ's table, it is a public manifestation of its reality.

If the Lord's Supper be thus intended as an exhibition of the union that subsists among the people of God, two inferences of very great importance necessarily follow, to which we invite the diligent and prayerful attention of the believing reader. The first is, that *none but those who have been converted to God should sit down at Christ's table.* The second is, that *those Christian societies only, whose members walk together in love and harmony, can observe, in a Scriptural manner, the ordinance of the Supper.*

4. Another great object which the Lord's Supper is intended to serve, is, *the exhibition of Christ's death for the salvation of men.* This we deduce from the words of Paul to the Corinthians: "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." The death of Christ is to be exhibited or held up to view, not only as the source of peace and comfort, and edification to believers, but as the sole foundation of hope to the ungodly. This is accomplished by the preaching of the gospel. The preaching of Christ crucified is the grand instrument for the salvation of a ruined world. And when a church assembles to celebrate the dying love of the Lord, Jesus is set forth as the Saviour of men. Not a word may be uttered to the ungodly, but the good news are silently made known. By the bread and wine that are employed, the death of Jesus is held up to view as the ground of hope to the sinner. The church points, as it were, to the wounds which Christ received when he suffered and died as the substitute of guilty men, and to the blood flowing on Calvary; and, as they take the bread and wine into their hands, they in effect say to the ungodly, 'These are the symbols of the





church, instead of standing erect among the nations, arrayed in her beautiful garments, lies defiled in the dust—and immortal souls are ruined for ever. O ye who love the Saviour's name, do ye not tremble at consequences so tremendous? Imagine not that you are guiltless in the matter, if you countenance by your presence the admission of ungodly people to the sacred ordinance.

One most ruinous consequence of admitting people in an unconverted state to the Lord's table, is the tendency

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admission to the Lord's table while you are unpardoned and unrenewed ? Remember the striking words of our Lord, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John iii. 3. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Luke xiii. 3. "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved ; he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark xvi. 16. It is high time this all-important matter were settled ; for you have not a moment to lose. O flee to Christ without delay, and he will save you with an everlasting salvation. Let it never be forgotten that a form of godliness will avail you nothing on the great day of account ; and that unless you are renewed in the spirit of your mind, your admission to the ordinances of the gospel will only aggravate your doom in the pit of woe.

sible kind. God is thereby glorified—the work of holiness is advanced in the souls of his people—and sinners are saved. When these ends are not accomplished, the failure arises, not from any defect in the institution, but from the improper manner in which it is attended to.—These glorious objects the ordinance is designed and fitted to promote ; and when they are not promoted, we may rest assured there is something wrong with those who take their place at the table of the Lord.

Many, alas ! it is to be feared, partake of the symbols of Christ's body and blood who have not been renewed in the spirit of their minds. They are not only ignorant of the nature of the institution and of the ends which it is designed to serve, but their hearts are not right with God ; they are unpardoned and unregenerated. It needs not excite our surprise, therefore, that they should derive no benefit from the Lord's Supper ; for they cannot discern the Lord's body. This ordinance is intended exclusively for the benefit of those who have tasted that the

with which he expects his people to meet
death.

That the Lord's Supper should be often celebrated, is manifest from the very *design* of the institution. It is intended to commemorate the dying love of the Saviour—to promote the work of grace in the souls of his people—to exhibit the blessed union that subsists among his genuine followers—and to hold up to view the death of the Son of God as the sole foundation of hope to the guilty. Now, is it not reasonable to suppose that an ordinance instituted to promote these glorious ends should be celebrated very frequently? If these be the objects which it is intended to serve, is it not palpably evident that the dying love of the Redeemer should be often, very often commemorated? Admit that the New Testament were altogether silent on the subject, that not a hint were given as to the frequency with which the ordinance

in commemorating his dying love. . . .
in a state of nature—if you are unconverted—O! do not dare to approach his table. By taking the symbols of his love into your hands while you are living at enmity with him, you will injure your souls—you will “eat and drink judgment to yourselves, not discerning the Lord's body.” If hitherto you have been in the habit of coming to Christ's table, you have thereby fearfully aggravated your guilt. O! never approach that table again, until, by believing on the Son of God, you have obtained the forgiveness of your iniquities, and have experienced that change of heart without which no sinner shall be permitted to enter the kingdom of heaven.

cases, the Word of God furnishes what is tantamount to a precept,—viz., *the example of the Apostolical Churches*. Everything relating to the constitution, and government, and worship of these primitive societies, was distinctly arranged by the apostles themselves, the inspired ambassadors of the Lord. Now, it must never be forgotten, that the example of these churches is absolutely imperative on all the followers of Christ—that it is as obligatory as any precept which the New Testament contains. We have only to ascertain, then, from the inspired record, how often the early believers met together for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, to settle the point. The moment this is satisfactorily established, the question will be for ever set at rest in the view of all the genuine followers of the Lamb.

In the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, v. 41—47, the sacred writer presents us with the most complete account of the worship of the first Christians which the New Testament contains. “Then they that gladly

of divine worship. This passage, therefore, proves that the church at Jerusalem broke bread frequently. Now, it will be readily admitted, that the members of that society met together for the worship of God at least every first day of the week. Is it not evident, then, that they celebrated the sacred Supper every Lord's Day? "If the instructions of the apostles, and contribution for the necessities of the saints, were observed every Lord's Day, by what process of reasoning can it be shown that the Lord's Supper was not?"

The next passage where reference is made to the time of observing this ordinance, occurs in the 20th chapter of the Acts, at the 7th verse. "And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them." We are told in the preceding part of the chapter, that the apostle remained at Troas seven days on the occasion referred to, in order that he might have an opportunity of meeting with the disciples,

ciples of Christ, Christianity will not appear in its excellence, nor the Church in her strength and beauty.

A very little consideration will serve to convince any reflecting and candid mind, that the Redeemer never intended the ordinance of the Supper for any but his own people, and that none but those who have believed in his name, who have experienced a change of heart, and whose walk and conversation in the world are consistent with such a profession, should take their places at his table. In a word, *those, and those ONLY, who have been converted to God, should commemorate the dying love of Jesus.*

This is obvious from the very *design* of the Institution. The Lord's Supper is a commemorative rite, intended to keep believers in remembrance of the dying love of their Saviour, to promote the work of holiness in their hearts, and to exhibit to the world the union that subsists among them as his friends and followers. How can these objects be promoted by those who have not tasted that the Lord is gracious, or by a promiscuous assemblage of con-

port of the weekly observance of the ordinance, it is necessary to bear in mind, that the church at Corinth had been in the habit of attending to it in a very improper manner, and that the grand object which Paul had in view in the latter part of the chapter, was to rectify the abuses that had crept in amongst them in regard to the manner of celebrating the Supper. The verse which has been quoted shows, that they were in the habit of attending to the ordinance every time they came together as a church, although in a very improper and unhallowed manner. Instead of simply partaking of the bread and wine, and thus commemorating the dying love of their Lord, they desecrated the ordinance by making it a common feast. The Apostle blames them for this, and points out the mode in which the Supper was to be celebrated. The fact, however, of their eating the Lord's Supper *as often as they came together in a church capacity*, renders it evident that they observed the ordinance every first day of

love. This is so very obvious, that one would think it requires only to be pointed out, to convince every reflecting mind of the impropriety of unconverted people sitting down at the table of the Lord. The Saviour's foes have no right to be there—they can derive no advantage from being there. Their hearts must first be changed—they must become *“new creatures in Christ Jesus;”* then, and not till then, can benefit be derived from the sacred institution.

But the grand question is, What saith the Scripture? What is the testimony of the word of God in regard to this point? Does the Bible countenance the admission of ungodly persons to the Lord's table. If it does, they ought by all means to be admitted. But if it be manifest from the New Testament, that none but those who have believed on Christ and been renewed in the spirit of their minds, should take into their hands the memorials of his sufferings and death; to admit the unconverted to the ordinance, is obviously to act contrary to the declared will of the exalted Head of the church.

The question, Who have a right to sit down at the

the most explicit precept. Is it not clear as noon-day, therefore, that it is the duty of every Christian society that professes to be formed after the primitive model, to shew forth the Saviour's death as often as they come together for the observance of divine ordinances? And does it not follow as a necessary consequence, that those churches which neglect the weekly observance of the Supper, and which surround the Lord's table only once a month, or once a half year, are not in this respect, followers of "the Churches, which in Judea were in Christ Jesus?"

"It appears to me a fact of much importance in this argument," says a judicious writer on this subject, "that it is impossible to frame a satisfactory proof of the Divine appointment of any portion of christian worship, which does not imply that the Lord's Supper formed a part of the ordinary worship of Christians. Does any one ask

the Epistles of Paul, with a view to satisfy himself in regard to this important matter; and, if he lay aside his preconceived opinions, he will not fail to rise from the perusal, under the full conviction, that the Lord Jesus Christ intended none but converted people to appear before the world as his followers.

In the 3rd chapter of the 1st Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians from the 9th to the 17th verse,* it is plainly taught, that those only should be admitted to church fellowship who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God. The Apostle warns those to whom he wrote against building upon the foundation that had been laid, "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble." By "gold, silver, precious stones," we are obviously to understand *genuine believers in Christ*; and by "wood, hay, stubble," are manifestly meant *unbelievers, unconverted people*. The two classes cannot possibly unite; a building constructed of such materials cannot be stable, it cannot stand the

* Our limits forbid us to quote at length, this and several other important passages of the Word of God referred to in the Tract. The reader is earnestly requested to peruse them carefully.

I am afraid no other answer can be given than this. We do not, in this case, keep the ordinances as the apostles delivered them to us. This is the substance of the argument from the practice of the apostolical churches, and it seems to me most satisfactorily to establish the obligation not only of frequent but of *weekly* communion. On the same principle on which christian churches meet without 'breaking bread,' they might meet without 'doctrine,' without 'fellowship,' and without prayers."*

The pious reader is affectionately urged to turn his attention to the investigation of this important subject. Let him endeavour to divest his mind of prejudice, and of preconceived opinions, and let him prayerfully consult his New Testament, with a view to ascertain how often his Saviour expects him to commemorate his dying love.

*"Hints on the Permanent Obligation and frequent Observances of the Lord's Supper," by Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, p. 34.

constitute the materials on which this glorious temple—the holy residence of the blessed Spirit—is built. This passage renders it clear as noon-day, that in the estimation of Paul, or, to speak more correctly, in the estimation of the Spirit of God, none should be admitted to the communion of a church, but those who give credible evidence of being born again.

This is plainly taught also by the same Apostle, in his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, from the 14th verse to the end of the 6th chapter. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" &c. From these striking verses, it is obvious, that believers and unbelievers are not to be joined together in the fellowship of the gospel. The two are as incapable of amalgamating as light and darkness. Is it not manifest then, that the Apostle here teaches, that none but those who have been converted to God should be permitted to enter the communion of Christian churches? If this be not a fair inference from the passage, surely it is not possible to draw a conclusion legitimately from words.

originally a heathen philosopher, but who was converted to the faith of the Gospel, and became an able and undaunted champion of the christian cause. "On the day that is called Sunday, all the Christians meet together, because that is the day of our Saviour's resurrection, and then we have read to us the writings of the Prophets and Apostles. This done, the President makes a speech, exhorting the people to practise what they have heard. Then we all join in prayer. The bread, wine, and water, are then brought forth, and the President having again poured out prayers and praise to God, there is a distribution and commemoration made of the sacramental elements. Last of all, those that are willing and able contribute what they think fit for the relief of the indigent." Is not this a striking commentary on the beautifully simple account which Luke gives of the worship of the church at Jerusalem? "They continued steadfastly in the Apos-

fessed to have been brought under the power of saving truth. There was no such thing then as a promiscuous admission to the fellowship of churches. Conversion to God was insisted on as an indispensable term of communion. Those only who professed to have given themselves to the Lord, were permitted to cast in their lot among his people. That the churches referred to in the Acts of the Apostles were composed of persons who were Christians in the plain, unambiguous meaning of the word, will not be questioned by many. This is evident from the language employed by the evangelist in describing their spiritual state. Thus of the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, gathered from among the Jews, it is said, "Then had the churches rest and were edified; and walking in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost were multiplied." Acts ix. 31. Phraseology equally expressive of real conversion to the faith, is employed respecting those societies that were gathered from among the Gentiles. On hearing the gospel, "they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed, and were

it—and all with one voice shall declare, that to come together on the first day of the week to break bread, was from the beginning and for many ages, the custom, the uninterrupted, unquestioned, undisputed practice of all christian churches :—as much so as it was their practice to sanctify the Lord's day, or to pay, praise and preach the apostles' doctrine upon it :—that as this was the most distinguishing part of their worship, so was it what they and their worship were described by, and the action by which among themselves the Lord's day was known ; what consequently they would least and last of all have omitted, while any degree of the purity of the gospel remained among them. How strongly does all this place the matter before us ! How clearly does this appear as the light from the scriptures ! And when all antiquity reflects it too in so direct a manner to us, what can we do

• Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Cent. 4. Chap. iv. Sec. 2.

described as persons who were " sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." 1 Cor. i. 2. The Ephesians are styled " saints, and faithful in Christ Jesus." Eph. i. 1. From such phraseology, it is manifest that the Apostle regarded the churches to whom he wrote as societies of believers—of persons who had passed from death into life.

It thus appears, that the early churches were composed of individuals who professed to have been brought to the knowledge of the truth. But, it has been asked, Were there no hypocrites in these societies ? No one can doubt that there were. But what conclusion is to be deduced from this ? Are we to infer that a promiscuous admission to the fellowship of a church is scriptural and proper ? No such thing. It must never be forgotten that in the primitive age, whenever a man discovered by his conduct that his heart was not right with God, he was excluded from the communion of the church to which he belonged. Look, for example, at the case of Simon Magus. The disciples ceased to regard him as a brother, whenever his true character was revealed. Hypocrites may

he succeeded no farther than in prevailing on the people to attend to the ordinance once a month. That Luther was of the same mind with Calvin on this point may be inferred from the fact that the Lutheran churches have a communion every Sunday, and holiday, throughout the year. The sentiments of Cranmer, and the other founders of the English church, were precisely the same, as provision is there made for the celebration of the Lord's Supper every Lord's day in all the Cathedral churches. Knox, who imbibed his theological principles from the Genevan Reformer, was very anxious, on his return to Scotland, to prevail on his countrymen to communicate at least monthly. His efforts for the attainment of this object, although at first successful, ended in the establishment of *quarterly* communion, a practice which obtained

• Randall on the Lord's Supper.

followers; but it is far from being obvious from the inspired narrative, that he was sitting at the table when the sacred Supper was celebrated. He seems to have left the apartment immediately after the celebration of the pass-over, to proceed on his murderous errand to the Chief Priests and Pharisees. But admit that Judas was present at the table when the heavenly Saviour placed the emblems of his body and blood into the hands of his disciples; what follows? that ungodly persons should be received into church communion? Most assuredly not. What was the character of Judas? He was not an openly wicked, immoral man. He seems to have enjoyed the confidence of his fellow-disciples, up to the hour in which he betrayed his Master. Judas was a *hypocrite*, perhaps a self-deceiver. The circumstance, then, of Judas being present when the Lord's Supper was instituted—if it was the case—proves that hypocrites may creep into the best regulated church, but it can never prove, that persons who give *no evidence of piety* should be admitted to the communion of Christian societies, and should be allowed to take their places at the table of the Lord.

Presbyterian minister in New York, in his "Letters on Frequent Communion," pleads earnestly for the weekly observance of the Supper, and feelingly laments the want of it among so many of the churches. In one of these letters he very strikingly remarks :—

Were Paul to rise from his rest, and to visit our churches, one of the first things he would miss, would be the communion table. What would be our confusion were he to address us in inquiries like these : 'How often do you remember your Redeemer in the Sacramental Feast? Every Sabbath? Every other Sabbath? Every third Sabbath? Every month? Alas, no. This was never heard nor thought of among us—'How often, then? Oh, I feel the rising blush—but the shameful truth must come out! 'Generally, not more than twice in the year.' What astonishment would seize the Apostle?—He would hardly own us for disciples! Is this, christian

of the parable settles this point. They are to grow together not in the church, but in the world. "The field," said Jesus, "is the world." It is in the world that believers and unbelievers—converted and unconverted sinners—are to live together in society, not in the church of Christ. Is it not strange that, with this explanation before their eyes, any should have inferred from the parable that our Lord intended persons of all characters to associate together in the fellowship of the gospel? The truth is, the parable has no reference to Christian communion at all; and those who view it in this light betray lamentable ignorance of its scope.

But it has been said, that to insist on conversion as an indispensable pre-requisite for church fellowship, is to assume a prerogative to which men are not entitled—the prerogative of searching the heart. This by no means follows. All that churches have a right to demand from those who seek admission to their communion, is, a profession of love to Christ, and a walk and conversation in the world consistent with that profession. Candidates for Christian fellowship may be deceiving themselves, or attempting to deceive others—they may be hypocrites; but

memorate his dying love every first day of the week. It is very evident that the primitive believers came together every Lord's Day for the express purpose of breaking bread, and it is as evident that every church of Christ should assign to the Lord's Supper a very prominent place in the worship of every christian Sabbath. It is not left to our option to attend to this ordinance or to neglect it, as may suit our convenience or inclination; the Lord Jesus expects all his people to follow the example of the early churches in showing forth his death as often as they commemorate his resurrection. It is not easy to see, then, how the believer can neglect the dying command of his Lord without sinning against him.

Many are ready enough to admit that the primitive saints attended to the Lord's Supper every first day of the week; but they are prevented from following out

genuine believers should be admitted to the communion of Christian societies. The conclusion, therefore, inevitably follows, that none but the true followers of Christ—none but those who have experienced a change of heart—should take their places at the table of the Lord. And it is equally manifest, from the evidence that has been adduced from the New Testament, that those who do not insist on conversion to God as an indispensable pre-requisite for Christian fellowship, and who countenance a promiscuous admission of saints and sinners to the sacred ordinance of the Supper, cannot be viewed as, in this respect, followers of the churches that were planted by the Apostles of the Lord.

This may be in opposition to the sentiments which some who glance over these pages may have entertained on the subject of admission to the Lord's table. But let it never be forgotten that the question is not to be settled by the views which any man, or any class of men, may have held respecting it, but by the Word of God. In all matters of this kind, our appeal must be made "to the law and to the testimony." The grand question is, What saith the scripture? Ascertain what the New Tes-

if we prayed only once a month or once a quarter. According to the principle of this objection, instead of the apostolic direction—"Pray without ceasing," the direction should be—"Pray very seldom: If you pray often, you will lose that seriousness and solemnity of soul with which you should approach the throne of grace." The seldomer you pray you will be the more solemn, and you will derive the more profit from the exercise." Every one sees the absurdity of this objection when it is applied to prayer, or to the reading of the Word of God, or to any other divine ordinance: Why then object to the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper on this ground? The breaking of bread every first day of the week has quite the opposite effect. When the soul is resting on the atoning work of Christ, and the mind is in a spiritual frame, the more frequently we approach his table the more delight do we experience, and the greater solemnity do we feel. "Can any man conceive," asks an eloquent writer

of the Lord, it is very obvious that no consistent follower of Christ can countenance by his presence a promiscuous assemblage of communicants at that sacred feast.

Words are inadequate to express the fearful amount of injury that has resulted from a promiscuous admission of persons to the Lord's table. An imposing array of members is thereby secured to the churches; but oh! on account of this the name of Christ is blasphemed among the ungodly and the profane—the mouths of infidels are opened to jeer and to mock and to villify his cause—the church, instead of standing erect among the nations, arrayed in her beautiful garments, lies defiled in the dust—and immortal souls are ruined for ever. O ye who love the Saviour's name, do ye not tremble at consequences so tremendous? Imagine not that you are guiltless in the matter, if you countenance by your presence the admission of ungodly people to the sacred ordinance.

One most ruinous consequence of admitting people in an unconverted state to the Lord's table, is the tendency

imagine that the followers of Christ in modern days, being placed in different circumstances, are not called on, in this particular, to follow their example. The reason generally assigned for this notion is the following:—It is supposed that the early believers, in consequence of the extraordinary sufferings to which they were exposed, and of the abundant measure of spiritual joy with which they were favoured, that they might sustain those sufferings, were in a state of continual fitness for taking into their hands the emblems of the body and blood of the Lord, but that we, being very differently situated, are not to be expected to be so constantly prepared as they were for partaking of the sacred Supper, and consequently that the weekly observance of the ordinance, which was proper for persons placed in their circumstances, is not required of us. It is at once granted, that between the

• Mason on Frequent Communion, p. 40.

with his friends. O ! who can calculate *the amount of injury* that has in this way been done to the souls of men ! Multitudes have pleased themselves with a profession of Christianity; with hearts unrenewed have they been admitted to the table of the Lord : and they have gone down to the grave with a lie in their right hand. O ! *how tremendous is the load of responsibility that rests on Christian ministers and Christian people on this account !*

Remember, dear reader, that, if you are not converted to God—if you have not believed in Christ—if you are not a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus—you have no right to approach his table. The Lord's Supper will do you no good unless you are born again : it is not designed as a converting ordinance at all. It is intended for the friends of the Redeemer, and not for his foes.—People often speak about admission to church *privileges*, and particularly about the privilege of sitting down at the table of the Lord. This is indeed an exalted privilege to a *child of God*, the highest which he is permitted to enjoy on earth ; but ah ! it is no privilege to an un-

tion which the primitive believers were privileged to possess, may be found in their close adherence to the word and ordinances of God. "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. And they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." It surely cannot be right to plead our leanness, our want of spirituality of mind, as reasons for not following these early professors of the christian faith. We are not straitened in God, we are straitened in ourselves. The way to attain to that ardour in the divine life, that exalted spiritual enjoyment with which the primitive believers were favoured, is to wait upon God as they did. The ordinance of the Supper is designed, and admirably fitted, to strengthen the followers of Christ when in a low and languishing state, to revive and refresh their drooping spirits, to assist them onward in their heavenly way ; is it not reasonable, then, that they should often partake of this sacred feast, that

blood of the Lord ?

It is a solemn thought, that without conversion to God there can be no admission to heaven. Why then seek admission to the Lord's table while you are unpardoned and unrenewed ? Remember the striking words of our Lord, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John iii. 3. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Luke xiii. 3. "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved ; he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark xvi. 16. It is high time this all-important matter were settled ; for you have not a moment to lose. O flee to Christ without delay, and he will save you with an everlasting salvation. Let it never be forgotten that a form of godliness will avail you nothing on the great day of account ; and that unless you are renewed in the spirit of your mind, your admission to the ordinances of the gospel will only aggravate your doom in the pit of woe.

observe this not only in the Sacred Volume. Read the New Testament from the beginning of Matthew to the end of Revelation, and you will not find the shadow of an allusion to any thing of the kind. You will find fasting recommended in the New Testament, but no mention is made of fasting in connection with the dispensation of the Lord's Supper. The truth is, the days to which reference is made are *entirely of man's invention*. They were altogether unknown in Scotland for more than a hundred years after the Reformation. They were never heard of till the period of the persecution that took place under Charles the Second. The days of preparation, therefore, being *entirely of man's instituting*, it is manifestly wrong to render them a necessary appendage to the Lord's Supper. The genuine followers of Christ stand in need of no such preparatory services when they approach his table; and those who have not tasted that the Lord is gracious, have no right to take into their hands the memorials of his

whether these things are so;" they would be at no loss to ascertain the mind of Christ in reference to the frequency with which he expects his people to commemorate his death.

That the Lord's Supper should be often celebrated, is manifest from the very *design* of the institution. It is intended to commemorate the dying love of the Saviour—to promote the work of grace in the souls of his people—to exhibit the blessed union that subsists among his genuine followers—and to hold up to view the death of the Son of God as the sole foundation of hope to the guilty. Now, is it not reasonable to suppose that an ordinance instituted to promote these glorious ends should be celebrated very frequently? If these be the objects which it is intended to serve, is it not palpably evident that the dying love of the Redeemer should be often, very often commemorated? Admit that the New Testament were altogether silent on the subject, that not a hint were given as to the frequency with which the ordinance

week. If you are living in such a way as to weigh the matter candidly and prayerfully, and follow out your conscientious convictions. We have seen that the primitive saints met together every Lord's day for the breaking of bread; and all who love the Saviour are solemnly bound to follow their example.



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sacred rest. These observances, as well as the frequency with which the ordinance of the Supper should be attended to, rest on other grounds. In regard to all such cases, the Word of God furnishes what is tantamount to a precept,—viz., *the example of the Apostolical Churches*. Everything relating to the constitution, and government, and worship of these primitive societies, was distinctly arranged by the apostles themselves, the inspired ambassadors of the Lord. Now, it must never be forgotten, that the example of these churches is absolutely imperative on all the followers of Christ—that it is as obligatory as any precept which the New Testament contains. We have only to ascertain, then, from the inspired record, how often the early believers met together for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, to settle the point. The moment this is satisfactorily established, the question will be for ever set at rest in the view of all the genuine followers of the Lamb.

In the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, v. 41—47, the sacred writer presents us with the most complete account of the worship of the first Christians which the New Testament contains. "Then they that gladly

and clearness to be much fitted to convince the humble inquirer, and remove the difficulties of the humble objector. Those acquainted with the author's writings will recognize at once, in the following unpretending pages, his usual candour and discrimination, and regard the succinctness and paucity of illustration which suited their original design as equally suited to their present form.

It is pleasing to perceive the rapid progress which Christians of different denominations are making towards apostolic practice. The open avowal which several ministers in the Established Church of Scotland and Secession Churches have made in favour of weekly communion, excites the hope that this part of primitive worship will, ere long, obtain the place from which it should never have been removed. And the publisher

these ordinances as often as they met together in a church capacity, and consequently, that the Lord's Supper was celebrated every time they assembled for the observance of divine worship. This passage, therefore, proves that the church at Jerusalem broke bread frequently. Now, it will be readily admitted, that the members of that society met together for the worship of God at least every first day of the week. Is it not evident, then, that they celebrated the sacred Supper every Lord's Day? "If the instructions of the apostles, and contribution for the necessities of the saints, were observed every Lord's Day, by what process of reasoning can it be shown that the Lord's Supper was not?"

The next passage where reference is made to the time of observing this ordinance, occurs in the 20th chapter of the Acts, at the 7th verse. "And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them." We are told in the preceding part of the chapter, that the apostle remained at Troas seven days on the occasion referred to, in order that he might have an opportunity of meeting with the disciples,

the resurrection, nor the resurrection apart from the death; the death being the atonement for sin, and the resurrection the evidence of its acceptance. Can any thing be more reasonable, then, than to unite the commemoration of the two? or any thing more previously probable, than that He who instituted the weekly celebration of his resurrection should associate it with the celebration of his death? We cannot separate them in thought; why should they be separated in commemoration?

3. If there were nothing at all determinate in the Scriptures respecting the frequency with which this ordinance should be observed, it must stand in a very peculiar predicament. The supposition comes as near as possible to a setting aside of the obligation to observe it altogether;

tended to the Lord's Supper weekly. "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper." To obtain a proper view of the force of the argument that is deduced from this passage, in support of the weekly observance of the ordinance, it is necessary to bear in mind, that the church at Corinth had been in the habit of attending to it in a very improper manner, and that the grand object which Paul had in view in the latter part of the chapter, was to rectify the abuses that had crept in amongst them in regard to the manner of celebrating the Supper. The verse which has been quoted shews, that they were in the habit of attending to the ordinance every time they came together as a church, although in a very improper and unhallowed manner. Instead of simply partaking of the bread and wine, and thus commemorating the dying love of their Lord, they desecrated the ordinance by making it a common feast. The Apostle blames them for this, and points out the mode in which the Supper was to be celebrated. The fact, however, of their eating the Lord's Supper *as often as they came together in a church capacity*, renders it evident that they observed the ordinance every first day of

that whenever the observance was attended to, it should be done in a certain manner, and for a certain end.

5. In Acts ii. 42, it is said, respecting the church at Jerusalem, immediately after its formation, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Now, assuming, what none of you will question, that the "breaking of bread" means the Lord's Supper, the passage clearly suggests—1st, The general idea of frequency—for how otherwise could the *steadfastness* of the church in the observance of the ordinance have been immediately ascertained? Had it been celebrated, for example, once in six months, it must have been *some years* before *steadfastness* could have appeared:—2dly. Its being a part of the *regular stated services of the church*, when they came together, by Divine authority, for the purposes of social worship; for it stands as one in an enumeration of these, and not at all as a rare or extraordinary thing.

called to remembrance his dying love, by partaking of the symbols of his broken body and shed blood. Now, let it be borne in mind, as has already been observed, that the example of the apostolical churches has the full force of the most explicit precept. Is it not clear as noon-day, therefore, that it is the duty of every Christian society that professes to be formed after the primitive model, to shew forth the Saviour's death as often as they come together for the observance of divine ordinances? And does it not follow as a necessary consequence, that those churches which neglect the weekly observance of the Supper, and which surround the Lord's table only once a month, or once a half year, are not in this respect, followers of "the Churches, which in Judea were in Christ Jesus?"

"It appears to me a fact of much importance in this argument," says a judicious writer on this subject, "that it is impossible to frame a satisfactory proof of the Divine appointment of any portion of christian worship, which does not imply that the Lord's Supper formed a part of the ordinary worship of Christians. Does any one ask

is said. No case of example can be clearer; and should it be alleged that it proves *too much*; because they "came together" on *other* days, as well as on the Lord's day, our answer is, though we can only state without illustrating it, that their other meetings were *voluntary*, whereas their meetings on the Lord's day were by *Divine authority*; and the authority which enjoined the day, enjoined also its observances. These simple scriptural arguments might be confirmed by an appeal to the universal voice of antiquity, so far as it can be distinctly ascertained, in the times immediately following those of the apostles. Into this detail, however, it is quite needless to enter.

I trust what has been said may confirm conviction of Divine authority and primitive example, as to the weekly celebration of the ordinance of the Supper. And if that authority be admitted, then there must in all cases of

answer is:—Fellowship was in the primitive church an accompaniment of the Lord's Supper. But if I am asked why, when on the first day of the week we meet for doctrine, and fellowship, and prayers, we do not break bread, I am afraid no other answer can be given than this:—We do not, in this case, keep the ordinances as the apostles delivered them to us. This is the substance of the argument from the practice of the apostolical churches, and it seems to me most satisfactorily to establish the obligation not only of frequent but of *weekly* communion. On the same principle on which christian churches meet without 'breaking bread,' they might meet without 'doctrine,' without 'fellowship,' and without prayers." *

The pious reader is affectionately urged to turn his attention to the investigation of this important subject. Let him endeavour to divest his mind of prejudice, and of preconceived opinions, and let him prayerfully consult his New Testament, with a view to ascertain how often his Saviour expects him to commemorate his dying love.

* "Hints on the Permanent Obligation and frequent Observances of the Lord's Supper," by Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, p. 34.

entirely the spiritual peace and joy of his people, the purity and vigour of the principles of the Divine life in their souls, and, consequently, the consistent practical godliness of their lives, depend on the constancy of their believing remembrance of himself. He knew, too, how eminently this was fitted to knit their hearts to one another in love. For these ends he appointed it; and if we *value* these ends, we must not neglect it.

Brethren, our attendance on the instituted ordinances of the Lord must not be allowed to depend on any thing so necessarily variable and fluctuating as the frames and feelings of our minds. This will never do. How would it answer to apply such a principle to the regular morning and evening exercise of personal or domestic devotion; and to neglect these, whenever we felt our minds not quite in the frame we might desire? If you complain of *coldness* and *deadness*, is the proper remedy for these the neglect of the very *means* that are appointed for *spiritual*

Eccelesiastical historian for satisfaction upon this point.

The following account of the worship of the churches, about one hundred and thirty years after the Lord's ascension, is from the pen of Justin Martyr, who was originally a heathen philosopher, but who was converted to the faith of the Gospel, and became an able and undaunted champion of the christian cause. "On the day that is called Sunday, all the Christians meet together, because that is the day of our Saviour's resurrection, and then we have read to us the writings of the Prophets and Apostles. This done, the President makes a speech, exhorting the people to practise what they have heard. Then we all join in prayer. The bread, wine, and water, are then brought forth, and the President having again poured out prayers and praise to God, there is a distribution and commemoration made of the sacramental elements. Last of all, those that are willing and able contribute what they think fit for the relief of the indigent." Is not this a striking commentary on the beautifully simple account which Luke gives of the worship of the church at Jerusalem? "They continued steadfastly in the Apos-

remembrance of his death? If he has not thought of attaining solemnity by infrequency in the one case, why should we in the other? Are we wiser than God?

3. The objection applies to every thing else that is sacred. "Pray without ceasing," is the Divine prescription; but the spirit of this objection would lead us to increase the solemnity of prayer by attending to it seldom, and surrounding the infrequent act of devotion with self-devised accompaniments.

4. If it does not accord with experience that reverence is diminished by frequency in regard to other acts of spiritual service, and if as to them no such plea for infrequency is ever thought of, why should this ordinance be the sole exception? Why should it be imagined, for how can it be the case, that frequent prayer, meditation,

all sorts of men have given; take the evidence from distant corners of the world, and as opposite characters in it as you please, from those who have no bias but to the truth, or from such whose opinions and interests would lead them to give this fact a colour if it could bear it—and all with one voice shall declare, that to come together on the first day of the week to break bread, was from the beginning and for many ages, the custom, the uninterrupted, unquestioned, undisputed practice of all christian churches:—as much so as it was their practice to sanctify the Lord's day, or to pay, praise and preach the apostles' doctrine upon it:—that as this was the most distinguishing part of their worship, so was it what they and their worship were described by, and the action by which among themselves the Lord's day was known; what consequently they would least and last of all have omitted, while any degree of the purity of the gospel remained among them. How strongly does all this place the matter before us! How clearly does this appear as the light from the scriptures! And when all antiquity reflects it too in so direct a manner to us, what can we do

...when, instead of checking the presumption of the thoughtless and the worldly, serves only to agitate with needless fears the spirit of the timid self-diffident believer?

"In imitation of the Apostles, the pastors of the ancient church did keep up the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day, through the second, third, fourth, and fifth centuries." To evidence this, if it were called in question, I might cite many passages from the histories of Eusebius and Socrates, and the writings of Justin Martyr, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Hieron, Ambrose, Augustine, and several others, who, on that account, used to call the Lord's Day *dies panis*, (the day of bread); but it being a matter of fact so notour, I need not blot paper with quotations to this purpose."—*Willison's Sacramental Directory*—(Minister of the Church of Scotland).

ages of the church, have entertained in regard to the frequency with which the Lord's Supper should be celebrated. It is well known that Calvin made a strenuous effort to introduce weekly communion into the churches of Geneva; but the prejudice against it was so strong that he succeeded no farther than in prevailing on the people to attend to the ordinance once a month. That Luther was of the same mind with Calvin on this point may be inferred from the fact that the Lutheran churches have a communion every Sunday, and holiday, throughout the year. The sentiments of Cranmer, and the other founders of the English church, were precisely the same, as provision is there made for the celebration of the Lord's Supper every Lord's day in all the Cathedral churches. Knox, who imbibed his theological principles from the Genevan Reformer, was very anxious, on his return to Scotland, to prevail on his countrymen to communicate at least monthly. His efforts for the attainment of this object, although at first successful, ended in the establishment of quarterly communion, a practice which obtained

• Randall on the Lord's Supper.



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deeply lamented the unfrequency with which the Lord's Supper was attended to in his day, and wrote a valuable little Treatise on this subject, in which he showed that weekly communion is consistent with the practice of the primitive churches. The late Dr. Mearns, a prominent Presbyterian minister in New York, in his "Letters on Frequent Communion," pleads constantly for the weekly observance of the Supper, and feelingly laments the want of it among so many of the churches.

In one of these letters he very strikingly remarks:—

When Paul to rise from his rest, and to visit our communion table. What would be our confusion were he to address us in inquiries like these: 'How often do you remember your Redeemer in the Sacramental Feast? Every Sabbath? Every other Sabbath? Every third Sabbath? Every month?' Alas, no. This was never heard nor thought of among us—'How often, then?' Oh, I feel the rising blush—but the shameful truth must come out! 'Generally, not more than twice in the year.' What astonishment would seize the Apostle?—He would hardly own us for disciples! Is this, christian

the Sacrament Sabbath, especially in country places, there is usually an extra congregation, collected from the surrounding neighbourhood, to whom a number of discourses are delivered in rotation, from morning till evening. Few people, however, are aware that this practice is entirely peculiar to Scotland, and that, except among the descendants of emigrants originally from this country, it is quite unknown beyond the boundaries of ancient Caledonia.

What, then, is the ORIGIN of practice so singular, and of which the body of professing Christians in this country are so very tenacious?

1. It has no foundation in the Bible—neither precept nor example can be found there to countenance it. This is so universally admitted, that it would be unnecessary to stay to prove it. No one now pretends to find anything in the Bible bearing the most distant resemblance to a modern Sacrament.

2. This practice did not originate with the founders of the Presbyterian system in Scotland. In proportion as professors decay in vital religion, in that proportion do they become fond of external splendor and show—of a

we have imitated from the sacred Volume, and then—
them coinciding with the views of those who have been eminent for piety, and learning, and usefulness among the churches of Christ.

The New Testament appears, then, clearly to teach, that it is the duty of all the followers of Christ to commemorate his dying love every first day of the week. It is very evident that the primitive believers came together every Lord's Day for the express purpose of breaking bread, and it is as evident that every church of Christ should assign to the Lord's Supper a very prominent place in the worship of every christian Sabbath. It is not left to our option to attend to this ordinance or to neglect it, as may suit our convenience or inclination; the Lord Jesus expects all his people to follow the example of the early churches in showing forth his death as often as they commemorate his resurrection. It is not easy to see, then, how the believer can neglect the dying command of his Lord without sinning against him.

Many are ready enough to admit that the primitive saints attended to the Lord's Supper every first day of the week; but they are prevented from following out

their convictions by certain difficulties that lie in their way. Not a few, for example, imagine that the frequent observance of the Supper has a tendency to destroy that solemnity of mind with which it becomes us to approach the table of the Lord. Now, it is readily admitted, that the weekly commemoration of the dying love of Jesus, *does* destroy that *superstitious* reverence with which the Lord's Supper is contemplated by multitudes. They appear to tremble at the very idea of taking the symbols of Christ's body and blood into their hands. This kind of mysterious awe and dread is certainly put to flight by frequent communion ; but it would be strange indeed if the scriptural observance of the Supper should rob the soul of that holy solemnity with which it should be regarded. Who does not see that the objection is perfectly groundless ? Are the other ordinances of divine appointment rendered less solemn by the frequency with which they are attended to ? Are we less solemn, for instance, when we are approaching the footstool of mercy every day, or every hour of the day, than we should be, if we prayed only once a month or once a quarter ? According to the principle of this objection, instead of the apostolic direction—"Pray without ceasing," the direction should be—"Pray very seldom : If you pray often, you will lose that seriousness and solemnity of soul with which you should approach the throne of grace." The seldomer you pray you will be the more solemn, and you will derive the more profit from the exercise." Every one sees the absurdity of this objection when it is applied to prayer, or to the reading of the Word of God, or to any other divine ordinance : Why then object to the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper on this ground ? The breaking of bread every first day of the week has quite the opposite effect. When the soul is resting on the atoning work of Christ, and the mind is in a spiritual frame, the more frequently we approach his table the more delight do we experience, and the greater solemnity do we feel. "Can any man conceive," asks an eloquent writer

already referred to, "why frequent prayer, meditation, &c., should promote the spiritual life, and frequent communion hinder it? Will increased faith produce unbelief; or renewed love indifference? Will melting views of divine grace harden the heart? or a commanding sense of the divine glory generate pride? Will fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, abate heavenly-mindedness? or the sealing of the Spirit of promise nurture carnal confidence? Oh—tell it not in Gath! Let not the rumour reach an uncircumcised ear; that believers in Jesus, who profess to love him supremely; proclaim his excellence to others; and declare, that the more they know and enjoy of him, the more they desire to know and enjoy;—that even believers in Jesus, when invited to frequent an ordinance, which he hath left as a seal of their covenant mercies; a means of intercourse with himself; a pledge of his eternal kingdom; should not only *refuse* but *justify* their refusal, by pleading that it would—**DIMINISH THEIR REVERENCE!**"*

It is readily admitted by many, that the primitive christians observed the Lord's Supper weekly, but they imagine that the followers of Christ in modern days, being placed in different circumstances, are not called on, in this particular, to follow their example. The reason generally assigned for this notion is the following:—It is supposed that the early believers, in consequence of the extraordinary sufferings to which they were exposed, and of the abundant measure of spiritual joy with which they were favoured, that they might sustain those sufferings, were in a state of continual fitness for taking into their hands the emblems of the body and blood of the Lord, but that we, being very differently situated, are not to be expected to be so constantly prepared as they were for partaking of the sacred Supper, and consequently that the weekly observance of the ordinance, which was proper for persons placed in their circumstances, is not required of us. It is at once granted, that between the

* Mason on Frequent Communion, p. 40.

sufferings and enjoyments of the early Christians and ours, there is a considerable difference ; but it by no means follows from this, that we are at liberty to neglect the weekly celebration of the Supper. It must never be forgotten, as has already been remarked, that the example of the apostolical churches is as imperative as the most explicit precept, and that believers in every age are solemnly bound to observe the ordinances of the gospel as they observed them. But not to insist farther on this at present, is it not obvious, that the argument now under consideration would furnish as good a reason for praying less frequently, as for eating the Lord's Supper less frequently ? " The first believers prayed always, for they were great sufferers and great receivers ; but we, who neither suffer nor receive so much, may be satisfied, though we pray much less than they." The matter requires only to be presented in its true light, to see the utter fallacy of the argument. Besides, it must be borne in mind, that perhaps one reason of the abundant joy and rich consolation which the primitive believers were privileged to possess, may be found in their close adherence to the word and ordinances of God. " They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. And they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." It surely cannot be right to plead our leanness, our want of spirituality of mind, as reasons for not following these early professors of the christian faith. We are not straitened in God, we are straitened in ourselves. The way to attain to that ardour in the divine life, that exalted spiritual enjoyment with which the primitive believers were favoured, is to wait upon God as they did. The ordinance of the Supper is designed, and admirably fitted, to strengthen the followers of Christ when in a low and languishing state, to revive and refresh their drooping spirits, to assist them onward in their heavenly way ; is it not reasonable, then, that they should often partake of this sacred feast, that

their souls may be received and quickened by meditating on the wonders of redeeming love ?

Many seem to be of opinion, that they cannot prepare themselves for coming to the Lord's table every first day of the week. What kind of preparation is required ? It is neither more nor less than faith in the Lord Jesus Christ manifesting itself by a life of holiness. No one is in a fit state for partaking of the symbols of the body and blood of the Lord, until by believing the gospel, he has rested his hopes for eternity on his finished work. A believer in Christ should always be prepared for taking the memorials of his dying love into his hands. The ideas which obtain about the necessity of preparation for approaching the Lord's table appear to arise from the practice of observing certain days of fasting, of preparation, and of thanks-giving, in connection with the celebration of the ordinance ; and it is conceived by many, that they are not in a fit state for partaking of the Lord's Supper if these days have been neglected. Now, it is sufficient to observe that not one word respecting such days is to be found in the Sacred Volume. Read the New Testament from the beginning of Matthew to the end of Revelation, and you will not find the shadow of an allusion to any thing of the kind. You will find fasting recommended in the New Testament, but no mention is made of fasting in connection with the dispensation of the Lord's Supper. The truth is, the days to which reference is made are *entirely of man's invention*. They were altogether unknown in Scotland for more than a hundred years after the Reformation. They were never heard of till the period of the persecution that took place under Charles the Second. The days of preparation, therefore, being entirely of man's instituting, it is manifestly wrong to render them a necessary appendage to the Lord's Supper. The genuine followers of Christ stand in need of no such preparatory services when they approach his table ; and those who have not tasted that the Lord is gracious, have no right to take into their hands the memorials of his

love, however diligently they may have attempted to prepare themselves.

The Redeemer, therefore, expects all his disciples to shew forth his death every first day of the week ; and the only preparation that he requires is a constant sense of his love upon their hearts constraining them to live not to themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again. Reader ! if you have not believed the truth concerning Jesus—if you have not been born again—you are solemnly enjoined, you are earnestly entreated, not to approach his table ; for, in your present state, you are not fit to take the symbols of his broken body and shed blood into your hands. The ordinance of the supper is designed exclusively for the disciples of Christ—for converted souls ; you have no right, therefore, to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. But if you have been renewed in the spirit of your mind, remember Jesus expects you to cast in your lot among his people—he expects you to show forth his death, and that every first day of the week. If you are living in the neglect of this ordinance, weigh the matter candidly and prayerfully, and follow out your conscientious convictions. We have seen that the primitive saints met together every Lord's day for the breaking of bread ; and all who love the Saviour are solemnly bound to follow their example.



ON
THE WEEKLY OBSERVANCE
OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER.

[The following Essay on the propriety and scriptural authority of weekly Communion, is part of a tract addressed, many years ago, by Dr. WARDLAW of Glasgow to his own church and congregation on several subjects. The tract was written and printed only for private circulation, and this part of it was published by the author's permission—being deemed from its simplicity and clearness to be much fitted to convince the humble inquirer, and remove the difficulties of the humble objector. Those acquainted with the author's writings will recognize at once, in the following unpretending pages, his usual candour and discrimination, and regard the succinctness and paucity of illustration which suited their original design as equally suited to their present form.

It is pleasing to perceive the rapid progress which Christians of different denominations are making towards apostolic practice. The open avowal which several ministers in the Established Church of Scotland and Secession Churches have made in favour of weekly communion, excites the hope that this part of primitive worship will, ere long, obtain the place from which it should never have been removed. And the publisher

of this tract would only add his prayer that neither prejudice, nor fancied expediency, nor any other obstacle may any longer prevent those who believe in its sentiments from practising them, and walking scripturally in all the ordinances of God's house.]

The following considerations regarding the Lord's Supper deserve serious attention :

1. From the nature of the ordinance, as commemorative of that dearest of themes to the believer's heart, the love of his dying Lord, it might be expected that all the wishes and desires of his soul should be in favour of frequency ; that there should be a predisposition to regard it as a privilege to himself, and a duty of affection and gratitude to Him, and consequently to ask, How often can I be allowed the enjoyment of it ?

2. The Lord's day is sacred to the memory and celebration of the *resurrection* of Christ. Now, if, in the wisdom of God, a weekly commemoration has not been deemed too frequent for his resurrection, can it be too frequent for his *death* ? The two are inseparable. Neither has any interest to us without the other—the death apart from the resurrection, nor the resurrection apart from the death ; the death being the atonement for sin, and the resurrection the evidence of its acceptance. Can any thing be more reasonable, then, than to unite the commemoration of the two ? or any thing more previously probable, than that He who instituted the weekly celebration of his resurrection should associate it with the celebration of his death ? We cannot separate them in thought ; why should they be separated in commemoration ?

3. If there were nothing at all determinate in the Scriptures respecting the frequency with which this ordinance should be observed, it must stand in a very peculiar predicament. The supposition comes as near as possible to a setting aside of the obligation to observe it altogether ;

for, in that case, there is no possibility of saying *when* any individual or any church is guilty of the neglect of it. The Independents of the south (England) employ the same arguments against *weekly* communion in favour of *once a month*, as are used by the Presbyterians of the north (Scotland) for once in the *half year*, or in the *year*; and he who should take a fancy to *two years* or to *ten years* might do the same. He who should observe it once in twelve years would go no further beyond the *annual* celebrator, than the annual celebrator goes beyond the *monthly*; and it becomes impossible to fix upon any professing Christian the charge of disobeying authority, except in the one case of his not observing it *at all*. Can this be?

4. I would found little or nothing on the words "*as often as*;" because, though they do intimate the idea of repetition, and of frequent repetition, yet they are not at all determinate; and the object of Him who used them was not at the time to inculcate frequency, but to enjoin that *whenever* the observance was attended to, it should be done in a certain manner, and for a certain end.

5. In Acts ii. 42, it is said, respecting the church at Jerusalem, immediately after its formation, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in *breaking of bread*, and in prayers." Now, assuming, what none of you will question, that the "*breaking of bread*" means the Lord's Supper, the passage clearly suggests—1st, The general idea of *frequency*—for how otherwise could the *steadfastness* of the church in the observance of the ordinance have been immediately ascertained? Had it been celebrated, for example, once in six months, it must have been *some years* before *steadfastness* could have appeared:—2^{dly}, Its being a part of the *regular stated services of the church*, when they came together, by Divine authority, for the purposes of social worship; for it stands as one in an enumeration of these, and not at all as a rare or extraordinary thing.

6. This is corroborated by Acts xx. 7. Look at it. Does it not convey the idea that "breaking bread" was one of the stated purposes of their coming together on the first day of the week? I think the "*when*" refers to the particular *time of the day* when they assembled for that special purpose. But, whatever be in this—had it been simply said "when the disciples *came together*," no one would ever have questioned the inference that coming together was their usual practice on that day. The other inference is equally valid.

7. Look, too, at 1 Cor. xi. 17-21. This is a very decisive passage as to the *matter of fact*.—1st. There must have been *frequency*, else there could not have been such early corruption. 2dly. The degree of this frequency is clear. They *came together* every Lord's day. But they came together "for the worse;" and the reason of this was the corruption in the observance of this ordinance, arising from their unhappy divisions. They must, therefore, have been accustomed to observe it; and it is not with the *frequency* but with the *corruption* that the fault is found. No case of example can be clearer; and should it be alleged that it proves *too much*; because they "came together" on *other* days, as well as on the Lord's day, our answer is, though we can only state without illustrating it, that their other meetings were *voluntary*, whereas their meetings on the Lord's day were by *Divine authority*; and the authority which enjoined the day, enjoined also its observances. These simple scriptural arguments might be confirmed by an appeal to the universal voice of antiquity, so far as it can be distinctly ascertained, in the times immediately following those of the apostles. Into this detail, however, it is quite needless to enter.

I trust what has been said may confirm conviction of Divine authority and primitive example, as to the weekly celebration of the ordinance of the Supper. And if that authority be admitted, then there must in all cases of

irregular attendance, be either a want of *right conception* or of *adequate impression*, of the duty. Now surely, with regard to the *object* of the ordinance, nothing can be more *simple*, and nothing more *important*. It is the commemoration of the atoning death of our common Lord, and the social remembrance of his love. Its *simplicity* is in beautiful harmony with the simplicity of the gospel testimony in which that love is revealed. The gracious Saviour invites to this simple feast of love, every simple-hearted believer in his name—every one who has learned by the teaching of his Spirit, the first elementary lesson of his gospel—the lesson of sincere, humble, exclusive reliance—the reliance of a guilty, lost, and helpless sinner—on his atoning blood and perfect righteousness, as the only foundation of hope. There is, indeed, a fence around the table; but it is not a fence of briars and thorns to any contrite and humble-minded friend of the Master of the feast. Its *importance* is equal to its simplicity. He by whom it was instituted knew well, how entirely the spiritual peace and joy of his people, the purity and vigour of the principles of the Divine life in their souls, and, consequently, the consistent practical godliness of their lives, depend on the constancy of their believing remembrance of himself. He knew, too, how eminently this was fitted to knit their hearts to one another in love. For these ends he appointed it; and if we *value* these ends, we must not neglect it.

Brethren, our attendance on the instituted ordinances of the Lord must not be allowed to depend on any thing so necessarily variable and fluctuating as the frames and feelings of our minds. This will never do. How would it answer to apply such a principle to the regular morning and evening exercise of personal or domestic devotion; and to neglect these, whenever we felt our minds not quite in the frame we might desire? If you complain of *coldness* and *deadness*, is the proper remedy for these the neglect of the very *means* that are appointed for *spiritual*

excitement? Is it not strange, when you mourn the lack of spirituality, to shun an ordinance, of which the leading design is to promote the very thing of which the deficiency is lamented? When any want of spirituality is discovered in any of the apostolic churches, do you ever find the apostles making it a part of their counsel, that this or any other ordinance should be relinquished, or be seldom observed? No. This was not their way, neither should it be ours. I need not surely, in addressing you, answer at large the common objection, that frequency diminishes solemnity. The following hints may suffice:—

1. There is no necessity for denying entirely the principle of the objection, although it might be fairly and strongly questioned. The simple inquiry should be, what is the will of the Lord? Ascertain this, and our ground is clear. Let us attend to the duty, and watch and pray against the danger.
2. The objection involves an impeachment of the wisdom of God. He has not considered as too frequent a weekly commemoration of the resurrection of Christ; why, then, should we regard as too frequent the weekly remembrance of his death? If he has not thought of attaining solemnity by infrequency in the one case, why should we in the other? Are we wiser than God?
3. The objection applies to every thing else that is sacred. "Pray without ceasing," is the Divine prescription; but the spirit of this objection would lead us to increase the solemnity of prayer by attending to it seldom, and surrounding the infrequent act of devotion with self-devised accompaniments.
4. If it does not accord with experience that reverence is diminished by frequency in regard to other acts of spiritual service, and if as to them no such plea for infrequency is ever thought of, why should this ordinance be the sole exception? Why should it be imagined, for how can it be the case, that frequent prayer, meditation,

and other sacred exercises, should *promote* the spiritual life, and frequent communion should *hinder* it? Frequent remembrance of Christ make us revere and love him less! Tell it not in Gath! What would the world think of such a sentiment?

5. Granting that, from its nature, there is a peculiar solemnity in the ordinance, does not the length to which this argument is often carried savour much more of the spirit of bondage and fear, than of the spirit of freedom, and humble confidence, and gracious filial affection which the knowledge and faith of the gospel are fitted and mercifully intended to inspire?

6. Is not that a *spurious* and *false* solemnity, which arises not from the nature of the ordinance, but from extraneous human additions to it?—which displaces it from the situation which it held amongst the regular observances of primitive worship? which, while it elevates one ordinance to an almost superstitious pre-eminence, proportionally depresses others? which divests it of that true scriptural solemnity, which lies in its sublime simplicity? which, instead of checking the presumption of the thoughtless and the worldly, serves only to agitate with needless fears the spirit of the timid self-diffident believer?

“In imitation of the Apostles, the pastors of the ancient church did keep up the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day, through the second, third, fourth, and fifth centuries. To evidence this, if it were called in question, I might cite many passages from the histories of Eusebius and Socrates, and the writings of Justin Martyr, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Hierom, Ambrose, Augustine, and several others, who, on that account, used to call the Lord's Day *dies panis*, (the day of bread); but it being a matter of fact so notour, I need not blot paper with quotations to this purpose.”—*Willison's Sacramental Directory*—(Minister of the Church of Scotland).

The great Reformer of Geneva thus speaks—"And, indeed, this custom which commands to communicate once only in the year is most certainly the invention of the devil, whoever was instrumental to introduce it. When there was a law made for communicating once in the year, it came to pass that almost all, when they had once communicated, turned slothful and slept securely throughout the rest of the year. But it should have been far otherwise; every week, at least, the Lord's table should have been set before the assembly of Christians, and the promises therein set forth, upon which we shall feed spiritually; no man, indeed, should be compelled to come by force, but all should be exhorted and excited, and the sloth of the negligent reproved."—*Calvin's Institutes*, lib. 4. cap. xvii.



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A BRIEF INQUIRY

INTO THE

ORIGIN AND TENDENCY

OF

Sacramental Preaching = Days.

It is well known, that in all the Presbyterian connexions in this country, national and dissenting, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is attended with a number of extra preaching-days. The previous Thursday is *wholly* devoted to fasting, and prayer, and preaching. The previous Saturday is considered as a day of preparation, to assist in which two sermons are ordinarily preached. The following Monday is regarded as a day of thanksgiving, to assist in which exercise, two sermons are also preached. Besides, on the Sacrament Sabbath, especially in country places, there is usually an extra congregation, collected from the surrounding neighbourhood, to whom a number of discourses are delivered in rotation, from morning till evening. Few people, however, are aware that this practice is entirely peculiar to Scotland, and that, except among the descendants of emigrants originally from this country, it is quite unknown beyond the boundaries of ancient Caledonia.

What, then, is the ORIGIN of practice so singular, and of which the body of professing Christians in this country are so very tenacious?

1. It has no foundation in the Bible—neither precept nor example can be found there to countenance it. This is so universally admitted, that it would be unnecessary to stay to prove it. No one now pretends to find anything in the Bible bearing the most distant resemblance to a modern Sacrament.

2. This practice did not originate with the founders of the Presbyterian system in Scotland. In proportion as professors decay in vital religion, in that proportion do they become fond of external splendor and show—of a

multiplicity of ceremonies and holy-days. Accordingly we find, that as vital godliness declined in the primitive churches, ceremonies and holy-days were introduced and multiplied, till, at length, every trace of the primitive Christian worship disappeared; and the public profession of Christianity becoming a mass of the most ludicrous mummary—of the most childish rites, retained nothing of the religion of Heaven but the name. When the churches of the Reformation withdrew from Rome, they brought away with them, and still retain, too many of those meretricious ornaments, with which the man of sin debased the religion of Jesus. To the honor of the Scotch Reformers it must be remarked, however, that they were, in this respect, in a great measure, singular. They rejected all unscriptural ceremonies and holy-days, and adopted a mode of worship sufficiently simple, and well adapted to all the ends of instruction and edification. Of such a religious festival as is now called a Sacramental occasion, they never dreamed. The Directory for public worship, adopted by them, is not only silent on it, but inconsistent with it. Dr. M'Crie, in his life of Melville, speaking of the attempt of King James to establish a religious anniversary to commemorate his escape from the conspiracy of the Earl of Gowrie, on the 5th of August, 1600, says,—“This appointment was at variance with the principles of the Church of Scotland, which, ever since the Reformation, had condemned and laid aside the observance of religious anniversaries, and of all recurring holy-days, with the exception of the weekly rest.”* This system, then, did not originate with the Reformers—was no part of the Presbyterian worship, as originally adopted in Scotland, and approved of by them.

3. It is not the result of the collective wisdom or combined sagacity of any of the great deliberative courts, that usually regulated the affairs of religion in Scotland, in former times.

Though we meet with acts almost innumerable, civil and ecclesiastic, enacting—enjoining—ordaining various things relative to religion, yet we look in vain for an Act of Parliament, of Assembly, of Synod or of Presbytery, enjoining that the administration of the Sacrament be attended with a routine of preaching-days. “It is to be observed,” says Mr. Douglas, “that these days were not

* Life of Melville, vol. ii., p. 171.

all introduced at once, nor in consequence of any general consent, or preconcerted plan; for they are the mere offspring of incidental circumstances, and can claim no relation to wisdom and counsel as their parent."*

How, then, it will be asked, were they introduced? I answer, strange as the answer may appear, no one knows with certainty when or how! Were we tracing to its origin one of those customs which took their rise in the midnight darkness of Popery, disappointment were naturally to be expected; but that a custom that cannot boast of two hundred years standing—that has obtained so universally, and of which the body of the people are so tenacious—cannot be traced; but by conjecture, to its rise, is not a little curious! "They were introduced," says Dr. Mason, "like all other unwarranted rites—by stealth. They originate, perhaps, in accident; they are continued without design; the popularity of a name recommends them to respect; one imitates another: and thus, ere ever we are aware, they glide into the worship of God, and usurp the dignity of his institutions." And again, "It seems evident that they crept into the church by *degrees*; that *custom*, regardless of the reason of things, and equally tenacious of the wrong as of the right, transmitted them to posterity; and that undistinguishing habit, and the belief of the cradle, have numbered them with the ordinances of JESUS CHRIST."†

It is more than probable, that they were gradually introduced during the prevalence of Episcopacy, and of the cruel persecution by which it was introduced and established against the general sentiment of the nation, during the first forty years of the 17th century. In the course of this period, many godly conscientious ministers were banished to Ireland, where they preached with great success, and from whence they occasionally visited their native land, to preach to their countrymen. On those occasions, the people crowded from all parts of the country to hear them, and to enjoy the Lord's Supper in the way to which they had been accustomed. Nothing was more natural than that the people, who had literally a famine of the word of God, should, on those occasions, eagerly desire as many sermons as could be afforded; and that those godly men should, as far as possible, gratify them. Saturday and Monday sermons were, therefore, exceed-

* Dialogues on the Lord's Supper.—Dialogue 5th, page 116.

† Letters on frequent Communion.—Letter 6th.

ingly natural, when crowds were collected at the appointed places, on or before Saturday, who could not retire to their homes till the following week. It is indeed probable, that such occurrences, occasionally, at least, took place previously to the height of the persecution which drove them into banishment. While many of their brethren fell in with the prevailing practice, the people would naturally follow those who held by their own beloved system, and suffered persecution for conscience' sake; and the attachment of the body of the people to them, and their aversion to the Episcopalian and temporizing Presbyterian clergy, would naturally increase the violence of the persecution against them.

In Ireland, the zealous labours of those men produced a considerable revival of religion. "During this time," says Mr. Randal, "one sermon on Saturday, and one on Monday, was all that they had; and generally but one minister assisting during the whole."* From this extract it appears, that a practice to which persecution had given rise in Scotland, was continued, probably without the same necessity, in Ireland. We may, therefore, conclude, that when those good men returned to their native land, about the year 1638, they imported this practice into their former scene of labour, where it has continued with various modifications to this day.

The late Dr. Erskine, speaking of the origin of this plan, says, "I know no certain account of that matter. It began, says one, in the persecuting times, when many ministers under hiding, and the whole Presbyterians of a country, by stealth, got together. And when they met together for this end, (to eat the Lord's Supper,) it may be once in several years, they knew not how often to preach; and the people had a boundless appetite to hear, so long as they could subsist and be safe."†

As to Sacramental Fasts, Mr. Randal supposes that they are also from Ireland. During the residence of the Scotch ministers in that country, they jointly held a monthly meeting for fasting; and frequently the Lord's Supper was celebrated in one or other of their parishes, on the following Sabbath. "I know," says Mr. Randal,

* Letter to a minister of the Church of Scotland, from his friend, concerning frequent Communicating.—Postscript.

† Dissertation on frequent Communicating.

"no such likely beginning to our Fasts before our Sacraments as this is." *

It is true that Mr. Livingstone preached on the Monday after the Sacrament at the Kirk of Shots, in the year 1630; but this sermon being preached at the particular request of Lady Culross, and with some reluctance on his part, proves that it was not then customary, nor understood to have any connexion with the Lord's Supper.

The foregoing conjectures of various writers, who have inquired into the subject, furnish us with the only probable origin of this system; and had it been laid aside when the cause which gave rise to it ceased to operate, it had been well. But the continuance of it without any adequate cause, or rational use, has done no little injury.

Before entering on the second part of the inquiry, viz. : the TENDENCY of this system, I must premise two things.

1. That I have no objection to week-day sermons, *as such*. It is the duty of preachers to "be instant in season and out of season;" and where people are ready to hear, the opportunity ought to be eagerly embraced; and may be expected to be followed with happy effects.

2. That I have no doubt that Sacramental preaching-days may have been made useful on many occasions, in the conversion of sinners, and building up of believers in faith and holiness. God has promised that his word shall not return unto him void; and whenever dispensed according to his own institution, his blessing may be expected with it. Yet notwithstanding these concessions, I maintain, with Dr. Mason, that this system is "attended with great and serious evils."† These evils may, perhaps, be comprehended under two heads—putting the Lord's Supper out of its proper place, and contributing to its profanation.

I. The system of preaching-days has put the Lord's Supper out of its proper place among Gospel institutions. That the Lord's Supper made a part of the public worship of the primitive churches, *every first day of the week*, admits not of rational doubt. What else would any man, unfettered by system, infer from the following passages, Acts ii. 42: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and breaking of bread, and prayers." Here, the breaking of bread is mentioned, not as an

* Letter, &c.—Postscript.

† Letters on frequent Communion.—Letter 7th.

extraordinary occurrence, but as a part of the ordinary duties of stated public worship. Acts xx. 7: "On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them." Here it is evident that one special design of their coming together on the first day of the week, was to break bread. 1 Cor. xi. 20: "When ye come together, therefore, unto one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper." This shews that the *avowed* design of their coming together, was to eat the Lord's Supper; but that their *manner of doing it* was inconsistent with this design. These passages mutually illustrate and confirm one another; and it would be a violent wresting of them, to compel them to speak any other language.

Nor was this the practice of the apostolic church merely, but continued for ages the invariable practice of all Christian societies. The late Mr. Randal, after having minutely investigated the records of the primitive ages of Christianity, on this subject, thus concludes, "Consider then antiquity in what view you please, the elder or the later accounts;—consider it among enemies or friends;—view it in its truth, or in its lies;—in its simplicity, or in its superstitions;—consider all the accounts, which all sorts of men have given; take the evidence from as distant corners of the world, and opposite characters in it as you please, from those who have no bias, but to the truth, or from such, whose opinions and interests would lead them to give this subject a colour, if it could bear it,—and all with one voice shall declare, that to come together on the first day of the week to break bread, was from the beginning, and for many ages, the custom, the uninterrupted, unquestioned, undisputed practice of all Christian churches:—as much so, as it was their practice to sanctify the Lord's day, or to pray, praise, or preach the Apostles' doctrine on it:—that as this was the most distinguishing part of their worship, so was it what they and their worship was described by, and the action by which, among themselves, the Lord's day was known, what consequently they would least and last of all have omitted, while any degree of the purity of the Gospel remained among them."*

The late Mr. Brown, of Haddington, is equally decisive on the subject: "That the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," says he, "was generally administered every

* Letter to a minister of the Church of Scotland, from his friend, concerning frequent Communicating.

Lord's Day, for the space of three hundred years, is beyond dispute."*

It appears that the Reformers were generally of the same mind on that subject, although from the rude materials on which they had to work, they were obliged to temporize. Calvin says, expressly, that "the Lord's table ought to be spread for his children every Lord's day." The Genevan Reformers introduced it monthly into their church, and it appears that the Scotch Reformers, as was to be expected, followed their example; for the "Book of common Order," supposes that the Lord's Supper was administered once a month. But with the present preaching appendages, it is impossible to make any thing like an approach toward the primitive practice. Thus a set of unscriptural holy-days—the mere inventions of men, have put the Lord's Supper out of its own place among Gospel institutions—have driven it into a corner. We find that in the Apostolic church, the celebration of the Supper constituted a weekly part of their devotions.

But from what particular reasons it hath grown into an Annual observance by any society of Christians, it is not difficult to say. It is owing to appending to it a preparatory and subsequent service, that hath no foundation in the original institution, and is no where supported by primitive practice. It is according to the institution, a plain and single devotional act, which may be performed as other religious duties, with the bare addition of external symbols. Indeed, it cannot be once supposed, nor do I know that it was alleged, that the primitive Christians in their distressed situation, could have fast-days, preparation, and thanksgiving-days; or that three, or four, or half-a-dozen of assistants and administrators could be collected together; such an apparatus was impossible, the Divine institution leads to no such an idea.†

Nor, let it be remembered, is the view of this subject maintained in this Inquiry, peculiar to those who act upon it. Presbyterians, both in and out of the establishment, have lately advocated the cause of weekly communion, by arguments that cannot be refuted. The writings of RANDAL and ERSKINE in the Establishment, of DOUGLAS and HUTCHESON among the Relief, and of

* Apology for the frequent administration of the Lord's Supper, page 6.

† See Sermons by the late Mr. Gordon, Minister of Speymouth, published 1786.

BROWN and MASON among the Seceders, are well known, and well worthy of the attention of all who would inquire into this subject. I am glad to know, that a respectable Presbyterian congregation in Paisley, have been for years in the habit of eating the Lord's Supper monthly. I trust they are aware, that "they have not yet attained, neither are already perfect,"—that they have no more Bible authority for monthly, than they have for yearly communion; though the one be *nearer* the Divine rule than the other.

2. The system of preaching-days has put the Lord's Supper out of its place, in point of solemnity and importance.

The Lord's Supper is a very solemn, a very important ordinance; but that it is so in a manner, or in a degree peculiar to itself, is without proof in reason or in Scripture. What Paul says to the Corinthians on this subject, (1st Epistle, chap. xi.) arises not from any peculiar solemnity in this ordinance, but from the manner in which they prostituted and profaned it. All the ordinances of the Lord are solemn and important, and to profane any of them is highly criminal. The ordinance of Baptism, for instance, is instituted by the same authority, and designed to represent the same truth—the salvation of sinners by the death of Christ; must it not then be equally solemn, and equally important; and must not the abuse or profanation of it be equally criminal? Yet how few are there, even among Christians, who view the subject in this light—who would not shudder at the thought of placing Baptism on a level, in point of solemnity and importance, with the Lord's Supper. Now, whence does this supposed disparity arise? Not from the language of Scripture on the subject of these institutions, surely. "Baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," is, to say the least of it, just as solemn and impressive as, "Do this in remembrance of me"—"As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death, till he come." Not from the nature of these institutions, for if they are enjoined by the same authority—distinct parts of the same religious system, and designed to represent the same important truth, they must be alike solemn in their nature, and alike entitled to our reverence and veneration. It must arise, therefore, principally, from the spurious glare thrown around the latter by a parade of holy-days, and a train of

prescribed exercises, by means of which every other ordinance is thrown into the shade, and dwindles into comparative insignificance!

3. The system of preaching-days has put the Lord's Supper out of its proper place, in the affections of the Lord's people.

These preaching-days have now been so long, and so closely appended to it, that they are viewed as an *essential* part of it; so much so, that to propose to lay them aside, would, in the esteem even of serious Christians, be nearly as bad as giving up the Lord's Supper. In fact, it is not eating the Lord's Supper, but the preaching-days, that in the estimation of the bulk of Christians constitute the *Sacrament*! It is these that constitute its main importance—its principal charm; hence appropriately enough called the *preachings*. Strip it of these external decorations—exhibit it in its native and primitive simplicity—introduce it as a part of the public worship of every Lord's day, and it will require no little training, to bring the minds of many Christians in this country, to view it without contempt. Such is the baneful influence of attempting to improve on the plans of Divine wisdom, and of adding to the institutions of the Lord! Besides, the false and fearful solemnity thrown over the Lord's Supper by these unscriptural appendages, contributes greatly to mar the peace and destroy the confidence of serious Christians in this delightful service. In place of eating the Lord's Supper with the confidence and freedom of children placed around their heavenly Father's board, they frequently approach with fear and trembling, their minds are possessed with fearful apprehensions of displeasing him, and so incurring his wrath; and their service is thus destitute of enjoyment, and their worship is often attended with a "spirit of bondage unto fear," unsuitable to their character, displeasing to God, and not a little distressing to their own minds. Now, with such apprehensions, and feelings, and views, the Lord's Supper cannot be approached with delight, nor regarded with affection. The preaching-days may be attended with pleasure, and with profit; but the table of the Lord is rather an object of fear, than of delightful anticipation—a scene of fear and trembling, rather than of filial confidence, and joy in God. Now, this state of things, which is by no means uncommon, must, in the case of Christians, arise in a great measure from the distorted views of its nature and

design which these extra days, with their usual services, are calculated to inspire. Whereas, when viewed in its native simplicity, unincumbered with human inventions, as a commemoration of the death of Christ, and a symbolical representation of the fellowship of all the children of God with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and with one another in the enjoyment of the common salvation, it is calculated in the highest degree, to inspire the Christian's mind with confidence, and joy in God.* But, not only have the preaching-days put the Lord's Supper out of its proper place in every point of view, but they have,

II. Greatly contributed to its profanation.

This is, no doubt a serious charge, a charge that would need to be well supported, seeing they are professedly designed to prevent this evil: yet, I am persuaded, the charge will be found but too easily made out.

To profane a religious ordinance is either to render it contemptible in the eyes of men, or to apply it to purposes for which it was not designed. Now in, both these respects, the Lord's Supper is greatly profaned by this unscriptural system—It is rendered contemptible in the eyes of all thinking men, whether religious or otherwise.

Contemplate, for a moment, the scene of a country Sacrament Sabbath. A number of the neighbouring ministers must attend, to assist—their parishes or congregations, if Dissenters, are left vacant. Should the day be favourable, the bulk of the population of these parishes crowd to the Sacrament; many, no doubt, from pious motives, but the multitude, principally youth of both sexes, for the same purpose for which they would go to a fair or a market—amusement and diversion, to see and be seen. Look at the bustle and confusion which the village presents; the roads and streets, and lanes, crowded with

* From the misapplication of such passages (Exod. chapters xix. and xx.) many of the best of Christians approach their reconciled God and Father with a slavish fear, like that of the Israelites when approaching the mount that burned with fire; or that of Peter when he said, "depart from me for I am a sinful man." They sit down at the table of the Lord, with as great terror as the high priest entered the holiest of all.—"Doubtless the seldom dispensing this ordinance has led many of the less judicious, into such melancholy superstitious apprehensions, and roused such terrors in their minds, that they could not attend upon God in this institution without distraction, and thus were deprived of much of the comfort and benefit, which otherwise they would have reaped from it."—*Erskine's Dissertation on frequent Communicating.*—Section 3d.

comers and goers all the day long: look at the public-houses; the ordinary number in some places will not do; the publicans hire their neighbours' houses, and employ waiters to sell their spirits; every window presents some significant mark, to indicate what is going on within. Think of the bustle, the confusion, the noise, that this state of things must create; not to speak of the drunkenness, the quarrelling, and even fighting, that sometimes ensue; think on these things, notoriously true, and say, can this be a religious ordinance, a Christian institution? Is it not much more like a popish carnival, than a Gospel ordinance? In fact, it is undeniable, that the scenes of a country Sacrament have furnished a late profane wit with materials sufficiently appropriate for his "Holy Fair." What a degrading, what a contemptible view, do these scenes present to thinking men, of the holy institution of the Lord's Supper!! What must sceptics, and infidels, and scoffers of all descriptions, think of that religion, of which they are supposed to be a part! I know, it will be said, that these abuses are no part of the ordinance of the Supper. Why then, are they associated with it? Why are they appended to it? Why is a system continued, calculated to produce and perpetuate such abuses? Would the simple observance of the Supper produce such effects, if these unscriptural appendages were given up? Impossible. While this system is continued, these abuses will follow it; and all attempts to persuade men of the difference between these abuses, and the system that gives birth to them, will prove vain and fruitless.

In an overture of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, dated October 5, 1748, we find the following remarkable declaration, in exact unison with what has been said above:—"That the manner in which this holy ordinance (of the Supper) is administered amongst us, greatly obstructs the more frequent administration of it; and particularly, the number of sermons, on such occasions, and the many parishes thereby laid vacant upon the Lord's day, are accompanied with several great inconveniences, if not also, too often, with *scandalous profanations of that holy day*.—That it would be for the interest and honour of religion, that some method were devised, whereby these abuses might be avoided, and the Lord's Supper more frequently administered, agreeably to the word of God,

to the apostolic practice, and to the practice of the primitive church.*

But this system tends to the profanation of the Lord's Supper in another, and a still more serious light; it becomes the grand means of prostituting it to carnal, unrenewed men.

The Lord's Supper is intended for those only who are his disciples, who love the Lord Jesus, who feel interested in his death, and who therefore can remember that death with those grateful and pious feelings that are suited to the exercise, pleasing to God, and profitable to the soul. All others, be they outwardly sober or profane, moral or immoral, are without any right to it, without any just views of it, without any advantage from it, and consequently only prostitute and profane it. But it is notorious, that multitudes, who give not the most distant evidence of conversion to God, will be found seated at the communion table, on the Sacrament Sabbath. Now, to this prostitution of this sacred ordinance, these services greatly contribute. The design and meaning of them, is to assist intending communicants in a train of previous preparation, to fit them for this important service. Hence the announcing of the Sacrament, some weeks before, becomes a sort of distant warning of the necessity of beginning preparation. But on the preparation Sabbath, a number of duties and exercises, in the view of the approaching ordinance, are prescribed; which, from their immediate connexion with it, are not understood to be necessary on ordinary occasions. Now, from what is ordinarily said on these occasions, people, even the most careless and irreligious, commonly infer two things—that going to the Lord's table is an important duty, a duty which it would be very criminal and dangerous to neglect, and which, being performed, will be attended with some special, though mysterious advantage, such as, eating the flesh, and drinking the blood of Christ, &c.; and, that a regular attendance on the public services of the week, and some attention to the personal exercises prescribed, will prepare for the due performance of this necessary duty. With the idea thus impressed upon their minds, that the would-be holiness of a week will compensate for the unrighteousness of a year, and secure the favour and approbation of God, what is to be expected, but that multitudes without faith, without repentance, without holiness,

* See Dialogues on the Lord's Supper, p. 49—Note.

without love to God, to his law, to his Son, or to his people, should, after a few formal prayers, and other prescribed duties, during the Sacrament week, be found at the communion table, on the Sacrament Sabbath, in the expectation of clearing scores with their Maker, who will as naturally, and as certainly, turn again to their vices, as the dog to his vomit, or the sow to the mire!

It is impossible not to see what a ruinous lure this must become to multitudes of precious souls, what a sad and fearful prostitution of a sacred ordinance, and what a distorted view of the simple and holy religion of Jesus, it must present to the world. Whereas, let it be exhibited in its scriptural frequency and simplicity; let it be divested of the parade of extra services that now mar its beauty, and obscure its meaning: let people be taught that it is not any course of prescribed preparation, but the possession of a previous character, that gives right to it, and benefit from it, and it will, by the blessing of God, go far to prevent these evils.

"Frequent and simple communion," says Dr. Mason, "will probably purge the church of unworthy members. Perhaps there could not be devised a more effectual expedient for getting rid of them, than employing them in spiritual work. With abundance of formality, they may attend to the notorious *externals* of religion: and as a bridle to conscience, and a set-off to character, they may have no objection to the communion, *if it be not too often*. Once or twice a year will do. But strip this precious ordinance of the additions that nurture legality, and flatter pride; let it be as plain as the Bible made it, and as often as a believer needs it; let there be nothing to render it impressive, but its subject, or alluring, but its spirituality; and mark the consequence. The former zealot will cool. Novelty, decency, example, may secure his compliance for a while; but it will be strange if his impatience do not at last get the ascendancy. Without affection to Jesus Christ, he will tire of His Supper. Without a principle of spiritual life, he will count spiritual worship intolerable; the more spiritual the more intolerable; and the holy communion, the most intolerable of all. His soul will loathe the heavenly manna, and by degrees he will drop off."*—"Are there not many now," says Mr. Randal, "who bear the fatigue of waiting on a

* Letters on frequent Communion, Letter 9.

yearly Sacrament, for different reasons, who would tire of an habitual continuing in what they have no relish for, or a church tire of them?"*

The late Mr. Brown, of Haddington, accounts, in the following rational manner, for the original deviation from the primitive frequency and simplicity of the Lord's Supper.—“When the church began to share the smiles and support of the Emperor, and his court, multitudes, influenced by carnal motives, thronged into it, and they were easily admitted, though indeed many of them were far from being visible saints. These carnal and court Christians disliked being from week to week employed in self-examination, and other preparatory work, or living under the impression of so frequent and solemn approaching to God. They also disliked the simplicity of this, as well as other gospel ordinances, and were mightily fond that the Christian worship should be modelled as near the Pagan and Jewish forms as possible. The clergy, possessed with the same vitiated taste, and besides, being very solicitous to procure to themselves the favour of the great, transformed the Christian worship according to these patterns.”† To the same purpose, speaks the late Dr. Erskine—“In the fourth century, defection from the primitive purity of the church, began more and more to appear. The most probable cause I can assign for this is, that till then the religion of Christ being persecuted, few professed it, who had not felt the power of it on their hearts. But soon after, Christianity becoming the established religion of the empire, a greater number of hypocrites, from views of worldly interest, intermingled themselves with the true disciples of Christ; and in a century or two more, this little leaven leavened the whole lump.”—“Such nominal Christians could have no just sense of the use and benefit of the Lord's Supper, and the obligations to frequent it. Having only the form of godliness, without the power of it, it is no wonder that the frequent return of religious exercises should be uneasy and disagreeable to them. Their example would soon be followed by lukewarm Christians, who had fallen from their first love.”‡

From the foregoing extracts, we see to what these respectable Presbyterians attribute the first departure from

* Letter to a Minister, &c.

† Apology for frequent Communion, p. 11.

‡ Dissertation, &c., section 2.

the simplicity of Christian worship—to the introduction of crowds of unrenewed men into fellowship with the churches; and if similar causes produce similar effects, wherever this practice is continued, all attempts at scriptural reformation will be defeated by these characters. We need not wonder that the Reformers, with all their influence, could not carry their reformation, on this head, to anything like the Bible pattern, or to what they themselves saw to have been the primitive practice; when we consider that multitudes embraced the reformed doctrines, who gave no evidence of conversion to God, and that all who became Protestants, were admitted to fellowship with the Protestant churches. Principal Baillie, of the University of Glasgow, one of the Commissioners from Scotland, to the Westminster Assembly, in one of his Letters, says, *that not one in forty of the members of the best reformed churches gave any evidence of true grace and regeneration!* How is it possible that such churches could be reduced to anything like scriptural order or discipline, or that such fearful crowds of unconverted men could be brought under the influence of the authority of Christ, or of the love of his simple and holy institutions? And in proportion as this state of things continues, in that proportion is reformation, in regard to the Supper, or any other point of scriptural order, unattainable. I am persuaded that there are now very few godly ministers, who have thought at all on this subject, who are not convinced in their consciences, that the Lord's Supper *was designed, and continued for ages to be a weekly institution of the Christian dispensation*; and that, consequently, sacramental preaching-days are not only unscriptural inventions of men, but also the cause of *much delusion*, the source of much self-righteousness, and the occasion of a dreadful prostitution of this sacred ordinance.

But then, as most churches are now composed and constituted, they are aware that any reformation, worthy of the name, is quite out of the question. Hence they endeavour to make the most and the best of things as they are. Indeed, when men prove to a demonstration, that the Lord's Supper was for ages a weekly institution with the followers of Christ, with what grace can they insist, as Randal, and Erskine, and Brown, and others have done, on a reformation that would only carry it to three or four times a year! There is something so in-



congruous in it, that thinking men rather let it alone altogether, than lay themselves open to the charge of such inconsistency.

On the whole, if sacramental preaching-days be in their origin modern, in their nature unscriptural, in their tendency injurious—if they have put the Lord's Supper out of its place, and surrounded it with a spurious solemnity—if they have marred its native simplicity, and obscured its genuine meaning—if they become the grand means of alluring carnal, unconverted men, to prostitute this sacred institution, and to deceive and ruin their own souls—if they give the world an unscriptural view of Christian institutions, and become an effectual barrier to reformation on this head, (and Presbyterians have often acknowledged, and deplored as much,)—if so, it is high time they were laid aside; and it is high time, too, that Christians, and especially Christian ministers, were seriously inquiring, how shall they be able to answer to God, for supporting and countenancing a system, so unscriptural in its nature, and so hurtful, to saints and sinners, in its tendency: and that too, it may be, in direct opposition to the convictions of their own minds! To conclude, let the reader attend to the following queries, by the late Mr. Brown:—"Whether is it grace or corruption that most affects to add human devices to God's worship, to make it more splendid than Christ has left it? May not persons be as really guilty of popery, by doting on the splendid pomp of Divine ordinances, that consists in the variety of days, sermons, and ministers, as by doting on the variety of fantastic ceremonies used in the popish mass? Ought we not to beware of adding to God's ordinances, as well as of taking from them? Is God content to barter with us on this point, by giving up with frequent communion, if we will annex a few more days, sermons, ministers, and people to it, when seldom administered? Where does he either make, or declare his acceptance of, this proposal?"*—The reader is requested to endeavour to answer these queries, in his own mind, as in the sight of God.

* Apology, &c., p. 37.

Christian Communion.

THREE are three things essential to Christian communion. The first is renewed principle, without which no man can be a Christian. The second is the government of Bible truth, without which Christian principle cannot be exercised. And the third is the voluntary connection of Christians in a church capacity, without which they cannot perform the duties of Christian fellowship. The principles of this fellowship, and the impossibility of their being exercised but among Christians, dwelling together in unity, shall be explained in the following remarks:—

1. The fellowship of believers and unbelievers in one church is declared, in the word of God, to be *utterly impracticable*. "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" 2 Cor. vi. 14-16. Now let us apply these questions to the principles of Christian fellowship, and see how they can be answered.

The basis of Christian fellowship is "love one to another for the truth's sake, which dwelleth in them:" but how can those be loved, for the truth's sake, in whom the truth evidently does not dwell?

Christian communion is a relation of Christian brotherhood. "All they are brethren," Mat. xxiii. 8. But how can those be acknowledged as Christian brethren who are the known "children of wrath?"

In Christian communion believers have a common interest in one another, as belonging to the same body. They are "members one of another," Eph. iv. 25. But "what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

Christian fellowship implies a joint interest in the things of God as "fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel," Eph. iii. 6. But how can those be acknowledged as fellow-partakers of spiritual blessings, who show, by their hearts and lives being not right with God, that they have "neither part nor lot in the matter?"

Christian communion implies agreement in sentiment

about the rules of Christian faith and practice, being "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," 1 Cor. i. 10. But how can those agree with Christians about the truth, whose "carnal minds are enmity against God, and not subject to his law?"

Christian communion includes a common experience of the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. It is "the fellowship of the Spirit," Phil. ii. 1. But how can those take part in this fellowship who are "sensual, not having the Spirit?"

The fellowship of Christians is productive of much comfort. "Their hearts are comforted, being knit together in love," Col. ii. 2. But what comfort can arise from walking with men, who are spoiling and hindering the work of God, and deceiving and destroying their own souls? and where is the evidence of spiritual taste in those who can "please themselves in the children of strangers?" Isa. ii. 6.

In Christian fellowship there is an agreed subjection to Christ alone, "One is their Master, even Christ," Mat. xxiii. 8. But how can those become yoke-fellows in this service who will not have "this man to reign over them?"

In Christian communion, believers are fellow-workers in the kingdom of God, "striving together for the faith of the gospel," that they may with one mind and one mouth glorify God. But how can those take part in this spiritual service, whose unrenewed condition leaves them capable only of performing "the works of the flesh?"

In Christian fellowship there are various duties which can be performed lawfully only to brethren. Hence the performance of these duties to false professors becomes a sinful and injurious misapplication of the divine law. It amounts to giving "that which is holy to dogs," and leads to consequences the very opposite of the design of the great Lawgiver.

Christian communion includes a joint participation in gospel ordinances, especially in the Lord's Supper. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread, for we are all partakers of that one bread," 1 Cor. x. 16, 17. But how can one make this confession at a communion table, while he is conscious that many who sit with him are not "partakers

of that bread," but "eating and drinking judgment to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body?" The man who signifies by his bodily exercise at a communion table what he knows is not true, is guilty of lying before God. And how can he expect to enjoy fellowship with God, when he thus comes before him with a lie in his right hand? It may be owing to this cause that many of the more serious people in corrupt churches find the *sacrament sabbath* a day of darkness and heaviness. No wonder then that they are clamorous against weekly communion.

Some have tried to get rid of this difficulty by alleging that in eating the Lord's Supper, each has to account for himself only. But this is not Scripture doctrine. It is not lawful for any to eat the Lord's Supper alone, or as an individual among many. It is a communion feast. One of the main designs of it is to shew forth the communion of the saints in "the body and blood of their Lord." Those, then, who associate with ungodly men at a communion table, are either guilty of lying before God, as has been already explained, or they do not attend to the supper as a communion feast, and "this is not to eat the Lord's Supper."

Others have endeavoured to strengthen their hearts in this work of corruption, by contending that no profession can be made of joint participation in the body and blood of the Lord, seeing that occasional apostacies forbid the conclusion that all are, at any time, genuine believers, in the purest churches. But this reasoning is subversive of Christian fellowship altogether. It might as well be reasoned that because we are not certain as to who may endure unto the end, we cannot acknowledge any to be Christians, or perform to them the duties of Christian fellowship. "The Lord knoweth them that are his:" but "secret things belong to the Lord." It is with what is seen and known that we have to do. When one seems to be a believer, it is duty to receive and treat him as such; and should his hypocrisy afterwards be made manifest, it is then duty to "count him a heathen man and a publican." Simon Magus was acknowledged, and treated as a believer, so long as his profession seemed credible, but when it appeared that his heart was not right in the sight of God, he was excluded, as one who had neither part nor lot in the matter.

2. It is commanded, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," 2 Cor. vi. 14. This command

ON CHRISTIAN COMMUNION.

is as express and positive, as "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

3. The churches are commanded to make the purity of their communion an object of special and diligent watchfulness, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God," Heb. xii. 15. This surely implies that none should be received or retained in a Christian church, but such as seem to be partakers of the grace of God.

4. Accordingly, it is further commanded, that all who are not partakers of this grace should be put away from the churches. "It shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people," Acts iii. 23. "If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican," Mat. xviii. 17. "Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." "I wrote unto you in an epistle, not to keep company with fornicators; yet, not, altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now have I written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner: with such an one, no not to eat."—"Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person," 1 Cor. v. 7-11, 13.

5. "When churches become so obstinately corrupt, that they will not obey these commands, believers are required to separate from them. "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord; and touch not the unclean thing," 2 Cor. vi. 17. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, from such turn away," 2 Tim. iii. 5. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sin," Rev. xviii. 4.

6. These commands correspond exactly with the Lord's work, in gathering the churches. "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"—rather, "such as were saved,"—"and of the rest durst no man join himself to them," Acts ii. 47 and v. 13.

7. The primitive disciples were conformed to the will of their Lord in this matter. They would not receive Saul till they obtained evidence of his being a disciple, Acts ix. 26-28. And it is said of "false brethren," that they were "unawares brought in," which implies, that they would not have been allowed to enter, had their character been known, Gal. ii. 4.

8. The same general principle is supported by the approved character of the primitive churches. "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul," Acts iv. 32. "The called in Christ Jesus," Rom. i. 6. "Sanctified in Christ Jesus," 1 Cor. i. 2. "Faithful in Christ Jesus," Eph. i. 1. "Saints and faithful brethren in Christ," Col. i. 2. "In God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Thess. i. 1. "Lively stones, built up a spiritual house," 1 Pet. ii. 5. "A building fitly framed together, growing unto an holy temple in the Lord—built together for an habitation of God, thro' the Spirit," Eph. ii. 21, 22. Characters of an opposite description were not acknowledged as belonging to the Church of Christ, for Paul says, "Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end," Heb. iii. 6.

9. Accordingly, the primitive churches were praised or blamed, as they supported this view of character, or acted otherwise. Those were approved who could "not bear them that were evil; and had tried them who said they were apostles, and were not; and found them liars," Rev. ii. 2. While others were rebuked sharply, for retaining some among them who held false doctrine, and were of immoral conduct. Rev. ii. 14, 15, 20. 1 Cor. v. 2.

10. The criminality of allowing corruption in churches further appears from observing how it affected the mind of Paul. In reference to such a case, he says, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote unto you, with many tears," 2 Cor. ii. 4. Can we suppose that to be a small matter, which so greatly affected the great mind of this man of God? We never read of his being so greatly affected by the whole amount of his other sufferings for the gospel's sake. That must have been a case of great evil, indeed, which so greatly affected a mind, otherwise capable of glorying in tribulation. What a contrast between this display of ministerial feeling, and that of those who can coldly contemplate the grossest impurities of their church, without a sigh and without a tear, and without any exertion to separate the precious from the vile.

11. Separation from a corrupt church is necessary for making manifest the true character and sanctification of a believer, and for making him "meet for the masters' use."—"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and

some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work," 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21. On this passage it may be remarked,

(1.) That the "*great house*," here spoken of, evidently signifies a corrupt church, because it contains vessels "to dishonour," as well as "vessels to honour." The expression "*great house*," seems to mark it out as belonging to the "*great city*," called "*Babylon the great*,"—a house made improperly greater, by the foolish builders, than a Scriptural one of proper materials would allow, obviously for the accommodation of a "mixed multitude" of "vessels of wood and of earth," as well as of gold and of silver.

(2.) When a community have become so great "by corruption that they cannot be purged by Scripture discipline, a believer must "purge himself from these." He must not remain under a foolish impression, that there are other vessels of gold and silver in this great house, as well as himself. He is in danger of being a partaker of other men's sins, if they are not removed; and must, therefore "purge himself from these," that he may deliver his own soul.

(3.) This separation from a church become great by corruptions, is necessary for proving a man to be "a vessel unto honour." So long as he remains among the "mixed multitude," he makes himself a doubtful character. It is doubtful to which class he belongs. If he can "bear them that are evil," it may be that he is allied to them and at heart one with them, under all his pretensions to superior sanctity. "But if a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour." It will then appear what spirit he is of, and to which class he belongs. And he will appear "unto honour." Though on account of this step he may be hated and despised of men, the enduring of this cross for the truth's sake, will procure for him the honour of consistency and decision of character, even in the sight of his enemies, and he and his work will be found to praise, and glory and honour, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

(4.) Such separation is an important branch of a believer's sanctification. Believers, in a corrupt church, may be sanctified in part. They may escape the grosser pollutions of the world, "through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and arrive at certain

degrees of circumspection and devotional seriousness, corresponding with their attainments in knowledge and grace. But they must be greatly wanting in love to God, while they can sit with his known enemies; greatly wanting in love to the brethren, while they can suffer sin upon them, and allow them to be partakers of other men's sins;—greatly wanting in compassion for poor sinners, while they can countenance them in maintaining their false profession, and altogether wanting in many important Christian duties, which can be performed acceptably only, in connection with faithful brethren. Hence, the force and propriety of the expression,—“If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, *sanctified*.”

(5.) This purging is also necessary for rendering a man “meet for the Master's use.” Those who are wedded to habits of impure communion, are very unfit for the work of building a “spiritual temple to the Lord.” Such will never be content to build with “lively stones” only. They must have “a great house;” therefore, they must build of all kinds of materials that will bulk well. They want to build a Babel, therefore they make the “people one.” Until a man purge himself from these carnal notions, he is not meet for the Master's use, either as a minister, or member, in building “a habitation of God, though the Spirit.” He is not fit for the kingdom of God. He is not prepared for any one good work, relating to the building and sanctifying of the house of God. He may do much work, but it will be bad work. He may build a “great house,” but it will be an insufficient house—a house that will neither stand the fire, nor the storm, nor the trial, of the Master of the house, in that day, when he will “try every man's work, of what sort it is.”

12. Those who remain connected with a corrupt church are partakers of her sins. This is a most unpopular and unpalatable sentiment, but it is scriptural. The truth of it appears from the command, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins.” Rev. xviii. 4. And the truth of it also appears from the nature of the case. Supposing servants were to connive with a band of thieves and robbers, so as to give them access to rob and spoil their master's house, and otherwise assist to secrete the stolen property, and conceal the guilty culprits; would they not, on this being fully proven, be found accomplices in the crime, and liable to the same

punishment? Now, this is the way in which Christ is treated by all who support impure communion. They open the door of communion to those who spoil and rob the house, and all their reasoning in defence of such conduct, is nothing else than an exertion to secrete the guilt, and conceal the true character of the main delinquents. But are they not verily partakers of their sins, while they thus aid, and assist, and defend them in their sins? The sin of unworthy communicating, like the sin of adultery, cannot be committed alone. A man must have some to sit with him, and partake with him in this ordinance, else he cannot attend to it. Mark then, reader, the worthless wretch who accommodates the vile adulterer, is not more a partaker of his sin, than those vile partakers of the sins of unworthy communicants, who accommodate them by partaking with them, without which they could not commit that sin. It is perhaps in this view of the matter, that impure communion is called adultery and fornication, in some parts of the word of God: and on this ground men are accountable for the sins one of another. Hence, in treating the sins which were in the primitive churches, the language of reproof is directed chiefly against the church, for retaining the offenders. The "deeds of the Nicolaitans," "the doctrine of Balaam," "the teaching of Jezebel," as well as the offence at Corinth, are all pointed at as grounds of complaint against the churches, for not having put away these evils from among them. And hence, those who walk with unworthy communicants, are not only partakers of their sins, by neglecting the means of deliverance, from sin in what Christ hath ordained "for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

13. Separation from a corrupt church is necessary for enjoyment of the divine favour. Hence the connection of the command, and the promise in the following words:—"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty," 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. And accordingly Isaiah speaks of the Lord forsaking "his people of the house of Jacob, because they pleased themselves in the children of strangers," Isa. ii. 6. "Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God," James iv. 4. God is jealous of the love of his people. If therefore they cleave

to his enemies, he will forsake them. If they come out from among them, he will be a Father to them. Many of the people of God have found it so, who speak feelingly of the peace and comfort they now enjoy in scripture fellowship, in contrast with the painful sensations formerly attending their intercourse with worldly churches.

14. There is great injury done to unbelievers by admitting them to Christian ordinances. It makes them, "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." It leads them to dishonour God by going to the communion table to betray the Son of man with a kiss, and afterwards returning to crucify him afresh, and put him to open shame by their ungodly conduct. It leads them to defile the temple of God, and exposes them to the threatening, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy," 1 Cor. iii. 17. It tends to shut their eyes against Bible truth, to harden their hearts against convictions of sin, and to make them "at ease in Zion." It tends to deceive their souls, in leading them to think that they are something while they are nothing, to rest in a form without the power of godliness, and to assume a name that they live, while they are dead. Proselytes of this description are twofold more the children of wrath than before. Oh, it is not kind—it is cruel—it is very cruel, thus to help forward poor blind sinners, who know not what they do, to work out their own destruction.

15. The admission of unbelievers to Christian ordinances is also an occasion of corruption and great injury to the church. It was with reference to this that Paul reasoned, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," 1 Cor. v. 6. Now, observe how the lump is leavened. One is observed indulging in one of those sins, concerning which it is said, that "they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." But because it is only one sin, or the sin of one individual, and not of gross enormity in the sight of men, it is counted "a little leaven," and is winked at, and neglected. But by this neglected sin others stumble, and fall, and are wounded. The forbearance of the original offence, seems to imply something approaching very nearly to preparation on the part of the whole community to do the same evil, and to do it with impunity. Hence, others are emboldened to indulge in similar sins, conceiving that the laws of equity entitle them to the advantage of the same forbearance. On the same ground, the more faithfully disposed begin to hesitate about attempting to remove

new offences, alleging that it would have been at variance with the precedents of former indulgence, or, that with the prevailing notions about this new forbearance, it could not be attempted but at the risk of producing contentions and divisions. And thus the whole church becomes leavened with conformity to the world.

The open display of this kind of liberality makes the world to fall in love with them, judging reasonably enough, that this is the church in which they can be accommodated in their favourite scheme of serving God and Mammon. Numbers of almost-Christians seek admission, who, of course, cannot be rejected if they are no worse than others, who are retained; and under impressions acquired by the previous progress of corruption, the church becomes easily reconciled to this laxity, finding that it tends so admirably to their prosperity in respect of numbers, and in a way too which frees them from the reproach of their former narrow-minded bigotry, and which affords them the smiles of the world, the praise of men, and all that may otherwise render them respectable in the sight of the multitude. In this way the church attains to prosperity; but what is its real condition? It has gained bulk, but it has lost its first love, its life, and its purity. It has become like one "sick of the palsy," without health, and without spiritual energy; the subject of incurable disease and corruption. Iniquity has abounded. The love of many has waxed cold. Times and laws have been changed in accommodation to the changed condition of the people. Mutual watchfulness is neglected. Scripture discipline is discontinued. Christian unity is broken. Christian confidence is extinct. Scripture ordinances are perverted. Every principle of Christian fellowship is excluded. And thus the whole lump is leavened into one mass of incurable corruption.

Now, supposing there may yet be found in this church, a very small remnant of those who have some good thing in them towards the Lord God of Israel, what is their condition? and what have they to expect by adhering to this kind of communion? They can expect nothing but the loss of their Christian privileges, while they are also partakers of other men's sins, and in bondage to men who will neither keep the law themselves, nor allow them to keep it scripturally,—characters who, according to the divine prediction, will become "snares and traps to them," "scourges in their sides and thorns in their eyes," a hindrance, a burden, a grief of heart, and a curse to

them in all their religious concerns. And if any professing to fear God do not feel it so, it is because they have become so far leavened by the spirit of their ungodly yoke-fellows, as to be sunk into all the insensibilities of spiritual declension.

16. The corruptions of churches will prove exceedingly injurious to those ministers who have taken part in promoting them. This is clearly set forth in 1. Cor. iii. 10-18, where this work of corruption is represented by the figure of a man building in the same house, "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and stubble." The first three of these, form a class of valuable and durable materials, representing believers, as suitable for building a house for the King, the Lord of hosts; but the other three form a class of perishable materials, very unsuitable for that purpose. These figures also set forth the extreme folly of those who attempt to build a house for God with such materials. There is not a man on earth, who would not be counted fit for Bedlam, were he to set about building a house of hay and stubble, for man. Yet many who profess to build a house for God of materials equally unsuitable for the purpose, are counted very wise and learned. Such is the blindness of men in things pertaining to God. "But every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward"—a reward of his whole work, given unto him "as a crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ." But if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; and surely the loss will be great. It will be the loss of all his labour—the loss of all his vain hopes of acceptance—the loss of expected reward—and the loss of many precious souls, deceived and ruined through the unfaithfulness of his ministry! O is not this enough to awaken and alarm those who are making merchandise of souls?

But some will say the case is not so alarming, seeing it is added, "But he himself shall be saved yet so as by fire." Now this implies the bare possibility of salvation. It reminds us of the passage, "Others save with fear pulling them out of the fire." The salvation of such can have no connection with their work; which tends to destruction, according to what is stated, verse 17. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." Yet such may be saved, if they repent. But if they are

saved, it will be as Lot was saved, with the loss of his stuff; or as the thief on the cross was saved, without rewardable works, and notwithstanding of their hay and stubble building having merited destruction.

Some of this class of builders who, for obvious reasons, cannot relish this view of the passage, have alleged that it refers to building true or false doctrine, or good or bad works on the sure foundation. But it is of building a church that Paul here speaks, for he begins the discussion by saying, "ye are God's building," verse 9; and towards the conclusion, he says, "the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are," v. 17.

Others have endeavoured to quiet their consciences in this work of corruption, by alleging that they stand exonerated by warning their people of the guilt and danger of unworthy communicating. Now Eli tried this plan long ago, but did not succeed in it. He warned his sons of the guilt and danger of their conduct; and this seems to have pleased himself, but it did not please God, for he complained of him to Samuel, that "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not;" and for this iniquity he and his house were visited with terrible things in righteousness, see 1 Sam. ii. iii. iv. Now what will be the probable effect of warning without restraining. A minister tells his people that "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body," but "he restraineth them not." Many are allowed to eat and drink, who are known to be in a natural condition, and therefore incapable of discerning the Lord's body, or any of the things of the Spirit of God. And this is very like as if a Quack should hold out a phial of poison to his patient, warning him faithfully that death would be the consequence of drinking it, and yet assist him in drinking it. Now, what effect is this likely to produce on a mind having any capacity or concern to think of it? He must conclude either that this man has no care for his soul—that he is just as willing that he should die as live; or that he does not believe one word of all the strong things he has said about the guilt and danger of eating and drinking unworthily. It is vain to talk about preparation for the Lord's supper, without discipline. The scripture plan is, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us; therefore, let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven of malice and wicked-

ness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," 1 Cor. v. 7, 8. It is impossible to keep this feast in faith, without mutual confidence as to godly sincerity and truth and brotherly love. Hence it is commanded, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Mat. v. 23, 24. A whole week, a whole month of preaching-days will avail nothing without purging out the old leaven. Nor will the most learned arguments justify the most respectable clergyman in this work of corruption. He may reason, and labour and prosper, and gain, in his own way, but in the end, "he shall suffer loss," and be in danger of losing his own soul also, except he repent.

17. The unscriptural fellowship of believers and unbelievers, has been a main cause of the heaviest judgments with which God has visited the world. What was the cause of the deluge by which God destroyed the old world? This calamity originated in the sons of God uniting with the daughters of men, Gen. vi. 1-3. What was it that brought upon the world the lasting curse of the confusion of tongues! It was an attempt to make the people one, between whom God had put enmity that provoked the Most High to inflict this punishment, Gen. xi. 6, 7.—Why did the Jews suffer seventy years' captivity in Babylon? It was on account of the corruption of their church: and it is on account of the corruptions of churches professing Christianity, that God will pour out the vials of his wrath in the latter days.

18. God calls upon all men every where to repent of the evils described in the foregoing particulars. The churches of Asia were called upon severally to repent of their corruptions. The church at Corinth was reprov'd, because they had not mourned so as to put away evil from among them, and they afterwards did repent; for Paul tells us, that it was "concerning this self-same thing, that they sorrowed after a godly sort," 2 Cor. vii. 11. But, reader, it is now time to inquire whether you have been a partaker of such sins, and whether you have repented, or feel now disposed to repent in consideration of what has been set before you.

Charity dictates the conclusion, that many serious people are wanting in this matter, from want of scripture knowledge of the subject, while exposed to the influence

of the teaching of those who are interested in supporting the work of corruption. But alas, there are also many who profess to know the Lord's will, who offer various reasons why they will not do it. There is a communication now before me, in which the writer holds forth in strong language, the corruption of all national churches, and of all seceders resembling these churches, shewing from the language of prophecy, the certainty of their downfall, who nevertheless contented himself for a time in connection with one of these churches, alleging that there was no call for separation till the approach of the millennium. Now, in reply to this, it may be said, that separation from incurable corruption, has been binding and necessary in all ages, and in all circumstances, for otherwise it is impossible to avoid the guilt and danger of being partakers of other men's sins. We also read of "a remnant of the woman's seed which kept the commandments of God and had the testimony of Jesus,"—a remnant who had "not defiled themselves with women," such as the daughters of Babylon. To them it was duty to adhere in times of the most abounding antichristian corruption, Rev. xii. 17. And when a man has become persuaded that a house is to fall, it is surely wise to leave it, least he also fall in its ruins.

But it is not of so much consequence to refute arguments, as to find out and expose the motives or causes which induce men to espouse and support corruption. When Christ reasoned with men who sought to excuse themselves in not obeying the truth, his words were not framed so much to repel their vain reasonings, as to expose the hidden motives which gave rise to them. I shall therefore now bring to view, what the scriptures point out as the causes why some adhere to impure communion.

The first of these is defectiveness of love to God. So Joshua understood it when he said, "Take good heed, therefore, unto yourselves that ye love the Lord your God. Else if ye do in any ways go back and cleave unto the remnant of those nations," &c. Love to God is here recommended as the only effectual preservative from cleaving to the men of the world. Love to God will dispose the mind to give a decided preference to the people of God, and the ways of God, and in so far as this preference is wanting, love to God is wanting. Christ requires this kind of evidence of love to him, for he says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

A spirit of conformity to the world, is another cause of

adherence to worldly churches. This is intimated in the exhortation, "And be not conformed to this world; but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God," Rom. xii. 2. A spirit of conformity to the world disposes to intercourse with the world. A spirit of conformity to Christ disposes to do the will of Christ at all hazards. A father observes his son strolling and playing with others of a disorderly cast, and calls him home in order that he may attend to his duty, and enjoy his privileges, and escape the danger arising from the evil communications of his naughty associates. The boy craves delay under various pretences, but it is evident that the love of play, and the love of bad company, lie at the bottom of all his arguments; and it is equally evident that it is the love of something gratifying to the fleshly mind in worldly churches, that leads any professing godliness, to plead for delay in leaving them.

Paul ascribes the toleration of corruption in the church at Corinth to pride. He says, "And ye are PUFFED UP, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you." 1 Cor. v. 2. Sin began by pride exalting itself against the knowledge of God: and it is owing to the humbling tendency of the principles of the kingdom of Christ, that they are rejected by those who, through the deceitfulness of sin, seek to nourish their pride by alliance with what is counted great and respectable in the sight of the world.

Another cause of disobedience in this matter, is want of a spirit of trembling at the word of the LORD. Hence, this gracious principle is pointed at by Ezra, as accounting for the Jews' consenting to separate from the people of the land with whom they had formed a sinful alliance, Ezra ix. 2-4; x. 3. When a man feels the effectual working of the truth, so as to tremble at the word, he obeys willingly; but where this is wanting, the mind will go no farther in obedience, than corresponds with carnal purposes.

Want of zeal for the purity and honour of God's house, also accounts for laxity of communion. The zeal of Christ for his Father's house, led him to cleanse it, and in doing it, his disciples remembered that it was written, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up," John ii. 17. But, where is the zeal of those professed friends of Christ, who can wink at the trade of making merchandize of souls, in the house that is called by his name?

Indifference about connection with a scriptural church is also a sure indication of the want of Scripture principles, in relation to Christian fellowship. No man could think of making a proper use of nets, and sails, and oars, or other sea-faring articles, on the top of a mountain. Such materials are of no use, but in doing business on the waters. In like manner, the principles of Christian fellowship cannot be exercised but in a church, scripturally constituted for their accommodation and use, as will appear from what is stated, page 1.

It is also evident that indifference about the spirituality of Christ's kingdom, arises from not living more fully under the influences of the Holy Spirit. *THE HOLY SPIRIT* leadeth into the truth, and worketh in the saints to will and to do God's good pleasure. But by grieving the Spirit, many are left to walk after their own conceits, by which they become indisposed for spiritual things. Reader, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways."—"Commune with your own heart."—Examine the motives of your conduct, as in the sight of God, and as having to give an account in the day of the Lord Jesus. And may the Lord give you an understanding and willing heart to do his will in all things, that his name may be glorified. Amen.



AN ARGUMENT

IN FAVOUR OF

INFANT BAPTISM.

SECOND EDITION, ENLARGED.

THE fact that we practise Infant Baptism should be esteemed a sufficient evidence that we are sincere in the profession of it, unless something appear to the contrary ; yet some Baptists, (I say not all,) working themselves up to a strong conviction of the absurdity of the thing, and its utter destitution of all evidence, either from Scripture or the nature of things, feel it a difficult matter to persuade themselves that we do not violate our conscience when we baptize children. If then a confession of our faith must be given in order to gain credence, I freely and firmly declare mine : I believe that the baptism of infants is divinely appointed ; I believe that the apostles practised infant baptism ; and I believe this on the best of all evidence, namely, because they themselves have told us that they did so. Now, if I can make this appear, if I can shew that the apostles tell us that they practised infant baptism, I shall sufficiently account for my own faith, and perhaps establish that of others, if not make some impression on the belief of those who oppose our practice.

I shall introduce what I have to say by referring to a remark of an old author, who says, If our translators had rendered the Greek word *oikos* (in our translation *house*, household,) *family*, the sect of Baptists had never existed. Now, *family* is the literal translation of the Greek, as is maintained by the best critics. And what is a *family*? Who are the persons referred to when we say, How is the family? or of such a person dying, he, or she, has left a large family? surely, the children. There can be no family without children. A man and wife are not a family. Servants are not a family.

I shall then illustrate the following proposition: *When the Apostles say they baptized an OIKOS a FAMILY or HOUSE, they use a term as expressive of the presence of infants, if not more so than if they had actually said they baptized infants.* The term infant is not a definite term, and though it had been used, it would not have prevented controversy, it would have been as liable to objection as the term family, or house. An infant, according to our law, is a person below twenty-one years of age; a person nineteen is an infant. In this sense Baptists might be said to practise infant baptism, while they baptize only adults.—I mention this to shew the extreme difficulty of employing words that cannot be controverted when there is an unwillingness to be guided by their general import.

Now for the proof—Acts xvi. 15. “And when she (Lydia) was baptized, and her household,” that is her house, her family, or children.

1 Tim. iii. 4. “One that ruleth well his own house, (family) having his children in subjection with all gravity.” The latter clause of the verse explains the former; his

* “A man's house (*oikos*) most properly means his children, his offspring, his descendants, and is generally used to denote these even exclusively.”—DR. WARDLAW.

children were his family, or house, and by having his children in-subjection with all gravity, he would rule well his own family, or house.

1 Tim. v. 14. "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house." Here is, first, marriage; secondly, child-bearing. When children are born, then there is a house, or family; and thirdly, the guiding of the house, or children, thus born. Here the term house means children, infants, as soon as they are born: it is then the mother's care begins.

Psal. lxxviii. 6. "God setteth the solitary in families," (*Heb. and margin, in a house*). That is, he setteth the solitary man, the person who dwelt alone, in a house: he makes him the father of children. House, here, must mean children, infants.

Psal. cxiii. 9. "He maketh the barren women to keep house, and to be the joyful mother of children." The woman had no house while she had no children; she is made to keep house by being made the joyful mother of children, and if this does not express the presence of infants, I know not what can. The first infant she should bear, would be her house.

In the following passage, house means an infant before it was born; Ruth iv. 11, 12. "And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is come into mine house, like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel. And let thy house be like the house of Perez, (whom Tamar bare to Judah,) of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman." THY HOUSE which the Lord shall give thee OF THIS YOUNG WOMAN; what can this mean? It can mean nothing else than an infant to be born of her. So soon as she should bear her first child, Boaz would have a house of her, House, here, then must mean infant, and only infant.

AN ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF

But this example is equal to a hundred. Let it be distinctly observed, that the language here used is not the language of an individual, but of all the people that were in the case, and the elders. We wish it not to be forgot that this was the current language of Judea, the language of the people at large, to call an infant in prospect about to be born, a house, and surely when born, to give it the same name.—what a wonderful change must have taken place, if a term so expressive of the presence of children, came in the Apostles' days to express their absence, their cutting off, and exclusion!

But this is not the only evidence that the passage affords of what we contend for. We have yet the expressions, *like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel*. The builders here are females, and how did they build the house of Israel? Was it by bringing adults into it, or was it by child-bearing, by bringing infants into it? How stood the fact, the historical fact of the case? He who denies that it was by child-bearing that Rachel and Leah built the house of Israel, denies a matter of plain, historical fact. And since the house of Israel was built by having infants born into it, then, surely the term house, must mean children, infants. Let a person try if he possibly can exclude the idea of child-bearing, of infants being born into a house, or family, is said to be built. Here, then, we have evidence the most satisfactory,—evidence to which no reflecting man can object; we have demonstration, that the term house is expressive of the presence of infants.

We contend that the term build, in connexion with house is decisive on the subject; it settles the point; it precludes controversy, as it irresistibly confines minds to the idea of children, or infants.

Gen. xvi. 2. "And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing; I pray

thee, go in unto my maid ; it may be that I obtain children by her." The Hebrew has it, *that I may be built up by her*. We hence learn the reason why a family is termed a house, namely, because it is built up of children. Infants are the stones of it.

Gen. xxx. 3. "And she (Rachel) said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her ; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her." Here too the Hebrew has it, *that I may also be built up by her*. This verse leads us to the same conclusion as the former. In the minds of the ancient people of God, the ideas of a house and children, or infants, were inseparable.

Duet. xxv. 9. "So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house." The case stood thus : the surviving brother was to take his deceased brother's widow and raise up seed to his brother, and if he did not take the widow, a punishment was to be inflicted on him ; but in taking her, and having children by her, he was said to build up his brother's house. The house then must be the children thus born.—The Apostles wrote the language of the Old Testament, that is, they attached to the terms they used that sense which they had in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Having ascertained then, from these passages, and they are many a repetition, that *oikos*, house, in its general, literal, obvious, and natural, import means family, children, or infants, we are now prepared to say who the Apostles baptized, when they say they baptized the household, *oikos*, house, or family, of Lydian, of the Jailor, of Stephanas, &c., namely, that they baptized their children or infants. Can we suppose that they would have employed a term so well understood by their readers, to exclude the presence of infants, if they meant to exclude them? We may believe it who can. On this supposition, we may say that they said one thing and meant

another, and we must despair of ever being able to affix definite ideas to any word employed by them. For my part, I understand the Apostles according to their plain, simple meaning; and believing them to have said that they baptized infants, I practise the same, and look on those who oppose it as opposing what the Scriptures teach.

No Baptist has ever yet given a satisfactory answer to the question, Whom did the Apostles baptize when they say they baptized houses? and we may despair of ever seeing a solution of it from them.

The way in which the baptism of Lydia's family is introduced, is worthy of notice. It is related without any intimation that the case was an uncommon one: it comes in as a matter of course, as if it had been an understood thing, that the family was baptized along with the parent. It was no new thing, but the following out of an established practice; and it may be noticed that what was done in one case would be done in all similar cases, that is, since the family of Lydia was baptized on the faith of their parent, the same would be done in all cases in which parents, having a family, believed. The account of Lydia, the Jailor, Stephanas, &c., is only a specimen of a general practice. Suppose then, that among the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost, there were three hundred persons having families, or let the reader take any other reasonable proportion he pleases. Here, then, are three hundred baptized families, yet, there is not in all these families a single infant, not a single young child! This is not believable. It would be contrary to matter of fact to suppose it. There is a moral certainty that there must have been infants in them. Let a person take three hundred, or, if he pleases, one hundred, or fifty families at random from any country, or town, or street, and let him say beforehand, in these fifty families there will not

be a single young child, and he will find himself very wide from the fact.—I mention this only as a confirmation of the direct argument drawn from the meaning of the term house, as expressive of children, infants.

The Baptist system carries something in its very face which may serve as a confutation of it. In reading the history of the Acts of the Apostles, we meet with the baptism of the parent, and his, or her house, or family, or children. In perusing the account of Baptist Missions, we read indeed of the Baptism of the adult, the parent, but we have no house, no family, no children. Here then is a defect. There is the want of the Apostolic house, and there is nothing as a substitute for it. But in the history of Pedobaptist Missions, we met with the baptism, not only of the parent, but also with the baptism of his, or her children. Here, then, if we have not to the very thing, the house, with which we meet in the Acts, we have a substitute for it, something very like it, but to me it appears to be the very thing. There is merely a change of the name, the term child, or children, being substituted for the more ancient one of *oikos*, house, or family. Therefore I conclude that Pedobaptists are nearest to Apostolic example.

Another conclusive argument in favour of infant baptism might be drawn from the fact, that young children were found in the Apostolic churches, Eph. vi. 1-4; and a thing from the Abrahamic covenant, in which a connection was recognised between parent and child never yet abrogated; but I have limited myself to one argument: and as to the mode, it has been satisfactorily shewn, that there is not a command to baptize by immersion, nor an example of baptism by immersion, recorded in the whole New Testament, but that *pouring* was the Apostolic mode: See *Facts and Evidences of the subject of Baptism* by the Editor of Calmet's Dictionary; I work that I

would recommend to all who have any doubts on the subject of Baptism : also Mr. Ewing's late Essay on the subject.

All controversy among Christians should have the tendency of bringing them together, but this can only be done by a firm exhibition of the truth. If my argument is valid, as I believe it is, then Baptists must be in error, and it is never too late to acknowledge, or to renounce that in which we have been mistaken ; and if my single argument should have the effect of hindering any from rashly embracing that which appears to me unsanctioned by the word of God, or if it should lead any who have embraced Baptist sentiments, to a train of thought that will ultimately bring them to see that their principles are untenable, I shall not consider myself as having written in vain.



A WORD ABOUT Infant Baptism.

THE writer of this Tract, believing that it can be distinctly shown that the baptism of the infants of believers is authorized by the word of God, begs the candid and prayerful attention of the people of God to the observations which follow:

One preliminary remark is necessary regarding the mode of proof adopted. Many of the opponents of infant baptism are accustomed to denounce all attempts to establish the propriety of the practice by inferential reasoning. They tell us that this is a subject on which such reasoning is inadmissible, and that nothing can justify the practice but a *direct* and *positive* announcement of the will of the great Head of the Church. To this I reply, that if we are sure it is truth we have ascertained, it matters not, so far as the certainty of it is concerned, in what manner we have ascertained it. All ascertained truth is equally certain. A truth arrived at by inference cannot be *less true* than a truth communicated by direct announcement. The only question is, "What is truth?"

Besides, it is only by inferential reasoning that we can prove the existence of God—the authenticity of the Scriptures—the perpetual obligation of the Sabbath—and many other doctrines "most surely believed among us." If inferential reasoning is allowed in reference to such subjects as these, what good reason can there be for declaring it inadmissible in regard to the subject of baptism? Are we to prescribe to God the manner in which He shall make known His will on this particular topic; or ought we not rather to receive with child-like docility, every intimation of His will, in whatever manner communicated?

That infant baptism is according to the mind of God is proved by the three following considerations:—

I. The church of God, though it has subsisted under various forms of administration, has been substantially the same since its original institution. When "the law was given by Moses," the patriarchal church was not dissolved and another set up in its place; the one church continued, with this difference, that the gracious principles of the Divine administration were more fully developed than they had before been. And when "the grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," the Jewish church was not dissolved, and another set up in its place;—the one church still continued, with a still fuller development of the principles of the Divine administration, along with the expulsion of those who had been unfaithful to the trust committed to them. This is manifest from the apostle's reasoning in Romans xi. 17: "If some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in amongst them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree, boast not against the branches." The church is represented as a tree, but the tree was not rooted up, and another planted in its place,—some of the branches were broken off, and others were grafted in;—the tree itself remained the same.

Since the church of God is one and the same church, in all ages, and under all the different dispensations of God's grace, it follows, that when God, at any time establishes a general practice in the church, that practice must continue to be observed until God himself repeals the law which prescribed it. For example: He established the practice of animal sacrifice; and this continued to be observed till, by his inspired servants the apostles, He declared in the plainest terms that the one sacrifice of Christ had superseded all other sacrifices. Had no such declaration of his will been made, the offering of animal sacrifices would still have been obligatory, for, in the church of God, He only who has authority to bind has authority to loose.

Now, read attentively the 17th chapter of Genesis, from the beginning to the 14th verse, and when you have done so, observe, that the covenant here spoken of is not a new thing, revealed now for the first time. It is the same which had been revealed from the beginning, for you perceive He does not call it simply a *covenant*, but emphatically and definitely "**MY COVENANT**," by which name it had been known to the fathers long before the time of Abram, (see Gen. vi. 18, and ix. 9-17.) It is the announcement of God's gracious plan of mercy to fallen man through a mediator, and it forms the basis of the church of God in all ages. It has not been disannulled by the law, called otherwise the Sinaitic covenant, or Mosaic dispensation, (see Galatians iii. 13-21,) but continues still to exist as "the New Covenant," in distinction from that made at Sinai, which has become old and vanished away. For this reason it is called also "the Everlasting Covenant," that made at Sinai having been but temporary.

The minds of many persons are much perplexed respecting this covenant. Finding that it is most frequently spoken of in the Old Testament Scriptures, they suppose that it must be part of the Old Testament dispensation, in distinction from the New; that is, according to their notions of things, of the Mosaic dispensation in distinction from the Christian dispensation. But it is not strictly correct to identify the Old Testament dispensation and the Mosaic dispensation, as if they were one and the same. The Mosaic, indeed, was an Old Testament dispensation, but it was not the Old Testament dispensation. Properly speaking, the Old Testament dispensation was the same in its essential elements with the New, for it was the dispensation of the *Everlasting Covenant*, which the apostle, in Galatians iii. 17, declares "was confirmed of God in Christ;"—the dispensation of the "*Promise*," as he otherwise terms it in the 18th and subsequent verses. It was in virtue of this "*covenant*," or "*Promise*," that the inheritance came to Abraham,

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(verse 18th)—the same inheritance which is given to all who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, for the blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles, (verse 14th.) Now, to any one who attentively reads from the 13th to the 18th verse of this same 3rd chapter of Galatians, it must be evident, that the dispensation of God's grace to us Gentiles, in New Testament Times is the same as it was to Abraham, and other believers, in Old Testament times, —in other words, that "the blessing of Abraham" comes upon us, as it came upon him, through the "covenant which was confirmed before of God in Christ;" and which "the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul"

If it is asked, What, then, do you make of the Mosaic dispensation? I answer: The apostle shows that it was an arrangement quite distinct from the great dispensation of the Covenant, though it did not at all hinder, but rather facilitate the working out of that greater dispensation. It came in (if I may be allowed the expression,) as a parenthesis; it was introduced into the midst of the Covenant dispensation as a subordinate arrangement, intended for a special purpose, and when it had served that purpose it passed away, leaving the dispensation of the Everlasting Covenant still in force. And if it is asked, What was the purpose for which it was thus introduced? the apostle replies, "It was added, (literally "*superadded*,"") because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made," that is, to show those who were under it what things were displeasing to God, and to convince them of their sinfulness, and consequent liability to the Divine displeasure, that thus they might be led to despair of saving themselves by any righteousness of their own, and be constrained to look for salvation to the promise of the Everlasting Covenant.

It is not correct, therefore, to speak of the Old Testament dispensation and the Mosaic dispensation as if they were the same. The one was but an appendage to the other. The Old Testament dispensation commenced with

the first gospel promise, given to man immediately after he had sinned;—the Mosaic dispensation commenced at the giving of the law from Mount Sinai, about 2500 years afterwards. The Old Testament dispensation was for the race of man;—the Mosaic dispensation was for the nation of Israel. The Old Testament dispensation has merged into the New, both being the administration of the same Covenant;—the Mosaic dispensation has been entirely and for ever abolished. In going back, therefore, to the Covenant which God established with Abraham, we are not going back to Judaism, but to that which, having existed before Judaism was, continues to exist now that Judaism is not.

To this view of the Covenant it has been objected, that, as established with Abraham, it contained promises of temporal blessings as well as spiritual, and was therefore, partly at least, of a carnal and temporary nature. But the objector forgets that the "New Covenant" includes temporal blessings still. Every blessing which God's people enjoy comes to them through this Covenant. All we have is through Christ, "in whom" this Covenant "was confirmed,"—the bread which supports the perishing body, as truly as the grace which saves the imperishable soul.

I have, perhaps, dwelt too long on this branch of the subject; but it is so ill understood by the many, that it seemed necessary to enlarge upon it, even at the risk of appearing tedious to the few. I return to the passage from Genesis, quoted above.

When God revealed this His everlasting Covenant to Abram, He established by law this practice, that the infant seed of a believing parent were, along with himself, to receive the mark of the Covenant, and thus be recognised as sustaining a certain relation to the church of God—not in virtue of their own faith, for they were incapable of believing, but in virtue of the faith of their parent. In other words, we find in this chapter a divinely instituted connection between a believer and his infant children, whereby, when the parent professed his faith in God's

Covenant, and was received into the church, his infant children were so carried along with him that they received the *same mark of the covenant*;—call it a mark of initiation, or whatever else you choose;—*the same mark* which he himself received. From the time of Abram this became the standing law of God's house. It was not peculiar to the Mosaic dispensation, having been established 430 years before that dispensation commenced. Now I ask, has this law ever been repealed? Has God ever declared, directly or indirectly, that it is His will that this practice should cease, and that "the children should *not* be as aforetime" (see Jeremiah xxx. 20.) If so, let the passage which contains such an intimation be pointed out, and there will be an end of the controversy. But no such intimation exists.

It is not necessary, in order to justify the practice of thus receiving the infant children in New Testament times, that their reception should be again commanded, as it was commanded in the case of Abram. *The former command remaining unrepealed, the practice continues as a matter of course.* But if the practice were to have been discontinued—if the children were *not* to be as aforetime, it was necessary that there should have been a distinct and unambiguous intimation of the change.

It is no reply to this argument to say that "baptism has not come in the place of circumcision." I do not affirm that it has, although, if I did, it might not be difficult to prove the truth of the affirmation. My argument, however, requires it not. What I affirm is, (and I repeat it) that it may be distinctly understood, that God established in his church *this* constitution of things, that when a parent was received into the church on a profession of his faith, his infant children had administered to them the same rite which he himself had, and by which he was recognized as belonging to the number of God's professing people. This divine law has never been repealed, consequently we are bound still to treat in the same way the infant children of church members, that is,

to administer to them the same rite by which adults are originally recognised as belonging to the number of God's professing people. That rite, under the New Testament dispensation, is baptism, and it follows that the infant children of believers are to be baptized.

II. So far from there being any trace in the New Testament of this connection between believing parents and their infant children being abolished, there are evident traces of its being continued.

First of all, there is the fact, that with the apostles of our Lord it was a common practice, when the head of a household believed, to baptize himself and his household. And notwithstanding all the attempts that have been made, it has never yet been proved, that the households mentioned in the narrative did not, like other households, contain infant children. Till this is proved, we have a right to assume that they did, and that household baptism was, in this respect, quite similar to household circumcision.

But such proof has been attempted. Let us look at it.

From Acts xvi. 34, it is said, that ~~at~~ the jailor's household must have been adults, for they all rejoiced and believed in God. It is not strange that a mere English reader should make such an assertion, but it is strange that those who know the language in which the inspired narrative was written should do so. Let any one who knows even the elements of the Greek language look at the passage, and he cannot fail to perceive that there is no proof whatever in the words used by the inspired writer, that the jailor's household believed. My limits do not admit of my entering the field of criticism; I must content myself with the above assertion, which indeed is sufficient to meet the assertion on the other side. Where no proof is adduced on the one side, no counter-proof is required on the other.

With regard to the household of Lydia, it is said, they must all have been adults, for they are spoken of in Chapter xvi. 40, as "brethren," whom Paul and Silas com-

forted. But in the first place, even though we should grant that this meeting of "the brethren" took place in Lydia's house, it by no means follows that these brethren were of the household of Lydia. And secondly, it is not even said in the narrative that the meeting took place in Lydia's house at all. Four things are affirmed in the verse in question:—1st. That the apostles went out of the prison. 2d. That they entered into the house of Lydia. 3d. That when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them. 4th. That then they departed. I ask any candid man, who understands what sound reasoning is, whether he can possibly deduce from these four facts, the conclusion, that the brethren spoken of were the members of Lydia's household.

Secondly.—Observe the manner in which the apostle Peter addresses the Jews on the day of Pentecost, in Acts ii. 38, 39; "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." That the promise here referred to is the promise made to Abraham—the promise of the everlasting covenant, is evident, for it is "the blessing of Abraham" that is said to "come on" those who "receive the promise of the Spirit through faith," (Gal. iii. 14.) Now, saith the Apostle, "this promise is *to you*," that is, to the adult Jews whom he addressed, therefore "repent," turn to God, believing the record concerning his Son, that ye may receive the blessing promised; and, as the mark or token of your doing so, "be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." Mark the explicitness of the language, "Repent and be baptized,.....FOR the promise is *unto you*." But the promise was not to them only; it was, as the Apostle adds, *to their children also*, according to its original tenor, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." Formerly, when adult proselytes were admitted to the privileges of the church of God, they were circum-

cised, or marked with the token of the covenant, *because the (covenant) promise was to them*; and their children also were circumcised, *because the promise was to their children*. And now, when Peter exhorts them to be baptized, because the promise was to them, and adds, that the promise was to their children also, must they not necessarily have understood him as meaning, that their children, having still the same connection with them as they formerly had, in relation to the covenant itself, were still to have the same connection with them in relation also to the token of the covenant;—that as they had been included in the *circumcision*, because included in the promise, even so they were to be included in the *baptism* for the same reason? If the fact of the promise being to the parents was a good reason why *they* should be baptized, surely the fact of the same promise being to the children was a good a reason why *they* also should be baptized. And if the apostle did not mean so, why did he, in connection with baptism, introduce the children at all, and affirm respecting *them* the same thing which he had just affirmed respecting the parents, and which, in the case of the parents, he adduced as a reason for their being baptized!

But the apostle adds something more. Not only is the promise to the Jews and to their children, it is also “to all that are afar off,” (*i. e.* the Gentiles,) “even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” All Gentiles who are called of God are, equally with the Jews, partakers of the promise; and as they receive all the privileges of the gospel as fully as the Jews did, (for “in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek,”) it follows, that the promise is to *their children* also, and that the same connection subsists between a believing Gentile parent and his children now, as subsisted of old between a believing Jew and his children.

Thirdly.—In 1-Cor. vii. 14, the apostle, after enjoining the believing husband or wife not to leave the unbelieving wife or husband, adds, as a reason, “For the unbelieving

husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband : else were your children unclean ; but now are they holy." Whatever the terms may mean, the fact is here plainly brought out, that in consequence of even one of the parents being a believer, the children are holy, not unclean ; and that if neither of the parents is a believer, the children are unclean, not holy. Here is a broad distinction declared between the children of believing and the children of unbelieving parents, a distinction founded entirely on the religious state of the parent, and in no way arising out of anything personal to the children. The general idea conveyed by the term "holy" is that of "separation," and this general idea is perceptible in all the different modifications of meaning with which the term is used. Without professing to determine the precise sense in which the term is here employed by the apostle, I beg the reader seriously and candidly to weigh all the different interpretations of the passage which he has met with, and then, without partiality or prejudice, to say whether any one of them is at the same time natural, probable, consistent with the context, and in accordance with the general usage of scripture language, except that which considers the passage a plain indication of that scriptural connection between a believing parent and his seed, of which I have spoken above, and consequently, as an argument, indirect but strong, in favour of infant baptism.

I shall mention only one of the many other interpretations which have been given of the passage. It has been supposed that the term "holy" is here used to signify "legitimate." If so, the correlative term "unclean" must signify "illegitimate." According to this interpretation, the apostle declares, that in consequence of one of the parties being a believer, the children are legitimate. It follows, that if neither of the parties is a believer, the children are illegitimate. Is it so, then, that the children of all unbelievers are illegitimate ? It must be so, according to the interpretation in question ; but surely the

mere statement of such a question is a sufficient refutation of that interpretation.

These are some of the traces which are to be found in the New Testament of the continuance of that spiritual connection which of old subsisted between a believing parent and his seed. There are others which might have been adduced and illustrated, had my limits permitted. But looking only to those which have been adduced, I confess it seems to me impossible to explain them in any consistent or rational manner, except on the supposition that infant baptism was practised in the apostolic age.

III. My third argument in proof of infant baptism, is the historical. And here let me not be misunderstood. I do not allege that because infant baptism was practised in the early ages of the church, therefore it must of necessity be right, knowing as I do, that, in reference to many subjects, those who are called "the Fathers of the church," made void the word of God by their tradition. My only object in referring to these Fathers, is, to show that infant baptism, instead of being "a modern innovation," was universally practised in the churches very shortly after the time of the apostles, and continued to be so for centuries, without the propriety of it being called in question. I cite the Fathers, not that they may give their judgment regarding a doctrine—for their judgment on doctrinal subjects I estimate somewhat lightly—but that they may give their testimony regarding a fact,—a fact concerning which they could not themselves be mistaken, and concerning which they could not give false evidence without being at once detected and exposed. As to the correctness of the inference which I may deduce from that fact, the reader must judge for himself.

Justin Martyr, who was born before the year 100, says, "There are many men and women of sixty or seventy years, who, from children, were made disciples to Christ, who remain uncorrupt, and I glory that I can show such from every nation,"* The period at which these

* *Apológ. prim.*

"Children" were "made disciples," must have been during the life of some of the apostles, or at least immediately after the death of the last of them.

Irenæus, born about the year 97, says of Christ, "For he came to save all by himself; all, I say, who by him are regenerated to God, *infants*, and *little children*, and boys, and young men, and elder persons."* The word translated "regenerated," is constantly employed by the Fathers to signify "baptized." *Irenæus* elsewhere clearly shows, that this is the sense in which he uses it; so that the passage contains a direct testimony, that in his time, i. e. immediately after the apostolic age, it was the common practice to baptise the "infants and little children," as well as the "young men and elder persons."

Tertullian, born about the year 160, exhorts parents to delay the baptism of their children, on the superstitious ground that sins committed after baptism were unpardonable.† In so doing, he shows very plainly that infant baptism was then the general practice.

Origen, born about the year 184, says, "Infants are baptized agreeably to the usage of the church."§ And again, "The church has received from the apostles a tradition to give baptism to little children also."‡ It follows that in *Origen's* time, infant baptism was the general practice.

Cyprian, who lived at the same time with *Origen*, informs us, that at the Council of Carthage, sixty-six Bishops were assembled to determine whether baptism might be administered before the eighth day after birth, and they unanimously agreed that it need not be delayed till the eighth day, but might be administered at any time.¶ The purpose for which I refer to this, is to show, that at this period, only 150 years after the time of the apostles, there was no dispute whatever respecting the propriety of infant baptism itself. All were agreed about

* *Conf. Haer.*, lib. ii. c. 39.

§ *In Rom.* lib. v. c. 9.

† *De Bapt.*, c. 18.

‡ *Homil. 8.* in *Levit.*, c. 12.

¶ *Cyprian Ep. 59*, ad *Flavianum*.

that. The dispute regarded only the time of administering the rite.

Augustine, born in the year 354, says, "The whole church practises infant baptism; it was not instituted by councils, but was always in use."* And he declares that he did not remember ever to have met with any person, whether Catholic or heretic, who denied that infants are baptized for remission of sin.†

Pelagius, who lived at the same time with *Augustine*, declares that he had never heard even any impious heretic who asserted that infants are not to be baptized.‡ Had the propriety of infant baptism been disputed in his time, he could not have been ignorant of the fact, for he was born in Britain, and travelled through France, Italy, Africa Proper, and Egypt, to Jerusalem.

I repeat, that I do not cite the Fathers to give judgment on a point of doctrine. I cite them only to give evidence on a point of fact. And from their testimony, the truth of which cannot be impugned, it appears, that in the age immediately following that of the apostles, infant baptism was the common undisputed practice of the Christian church, and continued to be so for several centuries. Had this fact not been notorious, these Fathers could not have written as they did, without being at once detected and exposed. Now, let us suppose for a moment, that infant baptism was not practised by the apostles,—that it was a human invention, introduced into the church their after time. The question occurs,—and it is a question to which I beg the reader's special attention:—*Is it possible that it could have become all at once the universal practice, without even one solitary individual lifting up his voice against the innovation?* Could the most eminent Christian Bishops have declared to the world that it had existed from the days of the apostles,—that it had never been disputed by any—when it must have been notorious, both to

* De Baptismo, Contra Donatistas, lib. iv.

† Wall's History of Infant Baptism, Part I. § 17.

‡ Augustin, de peccato originali, c. 17.

A WORD ABOUT INFANT BAPTISM.

them, and to every one else who attended to the subject, that it had sprung up in that very age! We put it to any man of sound and candid mind, *Can you believe this?* If not, you must believe that infant baptism was practised by the apostles of our Lord, and is therefore of Divine and permanent obligation. There is no alternative between the two opinions.

Take the following case by way of illustration. Suppose some eminent and godly man of our own day, such a man as Dr. Chalmers, for example, were to publish to the world that the Veto Act had been in existence and operation in the Church of Scotland ever since the time of the Reformation, from Popery; that it had originated with John Knox himself; and that its propriety had never been disputed by any one. Can any man believe that such a statement could be published without being at once marked with the brand of falsehood; or that it could go down to posterity, reiterated in various forms by other eminent and godly men in successive generations, and be found after the lapse of several centuries as an uncontradicted, undisputed statement? He who can believe this, is surely credulous enough; yet this is not a more probable case than the other, on the supposition that infant baptism was a human invention, introduced after the apostolic age.

On these grounds, it is believed that infant baptism is according to the will of God. As much as possible, minute details have been avoided, as I have been desirous of keeping the reader's mind fixed on the prominent features of the case. May what has been written tend to the glory of God, and may the Lord the Spirit, lead all who believe in Christ to know in all things, what the will of the Lord is.

APPENDIX.

A FEW COMMON OBJECTIONS TO INFANT BAPTISM SHORTLY ANSWERED.

Objection 1st.—What good can it do to an *unconscious* infant to be baptised? *Answer.*—Why not, as well ask, What good can it do an unconscious infant to be prayed for? If the unconsciousness is a valid ground of objection in the one case, it is equally so in the other.

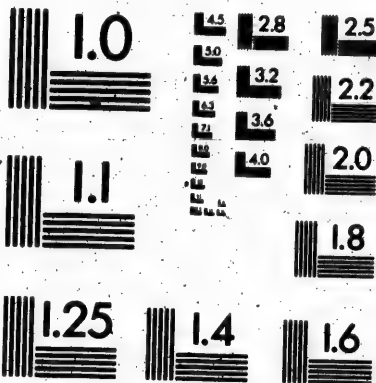
Objection 2d.—Is it not said, "Repent and be baptized?" and does not this imply, that without repentance there ought not to be baptism? *Answer.*—It is also said, "He that believeth not shall be damned;" and, according to the argument of the objector, this would imply, that without faith there can be no salvation, and, consequently, that all who die in infancy are lost. In both cases the affirmation must be limited by the nature of the subject spoken of; and as the one passage decides nothing respecting infant salvation, so the other passage decides nothing respecting infant baptism.

Objection 3d.—The Saviour was baptized when he was thirty years of age, and we ought to follow his example, for he said, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." *Answer.*—To fulfil all righteousness is to do all that God requires of us. But we must first ascertain that a practice is enjoined by God, before we can adduce this passage to prove that it ought to be observed, otherwise it is a mere begging of the question. The baptism of John, to which the Saviour submitted, and in reference to which he uttered the words quoted, was a Divine institution, and therefore it became the Saviour to honour it. But the baptism of John was not Christian baptism, for some who had been baptized by John were afterwards



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baptized by the apostles in the name of Jesus. (Acts xix. 1-5.)*

Besides, proving the propriety of adult baptism does not disprove the propriety of infant baptism. All pædo-baptists hold, that adults who have not been previously baptized ought to be baptized on a profession of their faith, be they thirty, forty, or even eighty years of age. About this there is no dispute.

Objection 4th.—If infant baptism were scriptural, might we not expect to find it occupying a more prominent place in the records of the Acts of the Apostles than even the baptism of adults? *Answer.*—Let the objector consider, that in the Acts of the apostles we have an account only of the commencement of the work of evangelizing the nations, and in every country in which this work is in its commencement, the baptism of adults must be first in order, and must occupy the most prominent place in the record. It is so still in the accounts of the labours of our pædo-baptist Missionaries in foreign lands. An individual believes, and he is baptized, and (if he happens to be the head of a family,) his household. But do we ever find in the records of the Missionaries of our Baptist brethren any thing like the household baptisms of which we read in the inspired narrative? True, they point us to cases in which all the members of a family have been baptized simultaneously, on a profession of their faith; but that is altogether a different thing from the baptism of a household, along with its head, when the faith of the head only is mentioned.

* See on this subject an admirable pamphlet by the late Robert Hall of Bristol, entitled, "The Essential Difference between Christian Baptism and the Baptism of John, more fully Stated and Confirmed."—*Works*, vol. 3d, small edition.

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